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NELLY'S TEMPTATION. Page 144.

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FINE FEATHERS

DO NOT MAKE FINE BIRDS.

CHAPTER I.

THERE was great excitement in Public School No. 8, that 23d of December. The usual soldier-like order and drill seemed entirely suspended; and all through the great building, from the Primary Department, through the Intermediate, and away up to the Grammar divisions, a bustle and confusion prevailed, which showed that something very unusual was going on.

A peep through any of the great glass doors revealed the occupants of each class-room busy, not with lessons, but with a great deal pleasanter work, in *their* opinion at least, if one might judge by the eager importance of each sunny face. The desks, the long benches, and even the floor, were heaped with great boughs of

evergreens; broad branches of pine, with its needle-like leaves; clustering bunches of laurel and hemlock; trailing wreaths of ivy and myrtle; and sprigs of holly, with its glossy, sharp-pointed leaves and ruby-like berries. The whole air was fragrant with their spicy perfume, and the children were as busy as bees in clover, twining them into garlands, with which to wreath every post and pillar, every window and door. The teachers were there, of course, to direct them; and the older girls, and even some of the boys, had already become tolerably skilful in their graceful work; so that now, at two o'clock in the afternoon, the great bare school-room had begun to be transformed into fairy bowers of evergreen bloom.

The large audience-room in front looked especially well; the principal's desk was quite like a throne, all draped in scarlet cloth, bordered with shining holly, and overhung with clustering boughs. A heavy green wreath was suspended from the arch above, and a beautiful flag of silk, mounted with silver, was gracefully draped before it.

Some of the taller girls were busy twining the chandeliers with slender wreaths of myrtle; and

Ned White, the head boy of the school, and a regular six-footer, was mounted on a ladder, and nailing upon the wall great card-board letters, which he himself had cut in the most florid German text, and sprinkled thick with powdered cedar, cemented with paste. These letters were grouped into all sorts of appropriate mottoes: "*Merry Christmas;*" "*Welcome to our Friends;*" "*Hurrah for the Holidays!*" "*Peace on Earth, Good Will to Men,*" and ever so many more. And the children watched, with great interest, the process of fastening them upon the walls.

Everybody was busy, and everybody of course was noisy accordingly. Not that the children were allowed to run from class to class, or really to jump and shout; but there was a great deal of going back and forth with twine, and tacks, and hammers, and a great many directions to be given. Neither was talking in a low tone among themselves forbidden to the children; so that any of my little readers who have ever attended a great public school can imagine what a busy and noisy scene I have invited them to look in upon.

Miss Kavanagh's room was the quietest of all,

for Miss Kavanagh was one of those faithful laborers in the Master's vineyard, who "sow beside all waters;" and she never missed an opportunity to plant the seed of a good thought in the hearts of her scholars. She was talking to them now, in her pleasant way, not a bit like a sermon or a lecture, about Christmas, and the reason why the whole Christian world unite to make it a season of joyousness and kindly feeling — a time for the interchange of good wishes and loving gifts. Not that it was the *real birthday* of Christ: no one could tell that precisely; but it was a day set apart in *remembrance* of his coming to bring peace on earth, good will to men, and therefore the brightest, and happiest, and most blessed day of the whole year. Not that there was no true peace on earth before Christ came, Miss Kavanagh said. Everybody had evil hearts then, as now; but, although God's mercy brought salvation to all who trusted in him, the eye of faith looked for the promised Messiah. And, at last, the Son of God, graciously pitying the sad condition of men, consented to leave his glorious home in heaven, where he sat enthroned at the right hand of the Father, and humble himself to be born of a

woman ; to come down and dwell upon earth ; to live among the poor and lowly, often having no roof to cover his head ; to pass his life in teaching men what they must do to be saved from the wrath of God, and in doing good to all ; and finally, to give up that precious life, to bear the shameful death of the cross, that he might be the propitiation for our sins, and that, by taking our punishment upon himself, we might be saved from the doom of eternal death ; so that now, all we needed to do was to feel that we were really sinful, that we deserved God's anger, and that of ourselves we had no power to help ourselves ; and to be willing to be saved entirely for Christ's sake ; after that, to try, by the help of his Spirit, to lead a life after the pattern of Him who went about doing good.

It was the thought of all this wonderful work, which Christ had done for them, which made real Christians feel such a holy pleasure in Christmas Day, Miss Kavanagh said ; and she wanted all her scholars to add this sacred joy to the mirth and gayety of the season. It would not take from their merriment at all, but add a sweeter and purer zest to it ; the memory of that first Christmas Day, so many, many years

ago, when the child Jesus, who had come to be the Savior of the world, lay, a tiny infant, by his mother's side, in his manger-cradle.

All this, and more Miss Kavanagh said, while her fingers were busy twining holly and bay, and her eyes here and there, over her class; and she spoke so pleasantly, although seriously, as became such solemn truths, that the girls did not get tired at all, but listened with much interest, going on with their work all the time, and feeling a truer spirit of Christmas coming into their happy little hearts.

Only one little girl, with eyes as black as sloes, and long black hair braided tightly about her smart little head, was very plainly not interested at all in what her teacher was saying, or even in the pretty wreath of myrtle and "creeping Jenny" that was growing beneath her fingers. She fidgeted and twisted, jerked the sprigs of evergreen about, flashed impatient glances at Miss Kavanagh, and at length, when that lady had finished talking, whispered to the girl next her, almost loud enough to be heard, —

"There, she has done her long lecture at last."

Her companion looked up in surprise.

"Why, Nelly," she said, "it wasn't a bit like

a lecture. I like to hear Miss Kavanagh talk, and I like her."

"Well, I don't, then, I can tell you; and I shouldn't think you would, Maggie Lang, after her keeping you in till four o'clock, the other day, about your grammar lesson."

Maggie's fair cheek reddened, but she answered, stoutly, —

"It was my own fault; I could have learned it in fifteen minutes, if I had chosen; but I was sulky, and wouldn't. She had a better right to be angry with me for keeping *her* here so long, waiting for me."

"O, O! I've pricked my finger!" was Nelly's only answer to this speech; "see, Maggie, it looks like one of the holly berries — doesn't it?" And she held up her little brown forefinger, where a drop of bright red blood had followed quickly the puncture of the sharp-pointed leaf.

"O, that's too bad! Doesn't it hurt, Nelly? Here, let me wrap my handkerchief round it," said kind-hearted little Maggie, with ready sympathy. "I haven't pricked myself yet, but my fingers are all sticky with this pine. 'Pitch, tar, and turpentine,' as the geography says. I don't think I shall forget, after to-day, that they come from pine trees."

“O, don’t talk of geography now!” exclaimed Nelly, impatiently. “All that is done for one blessed week, anyhow. I’m so glad Christmas is coming — aren’t you, Maggie? Just to get rid of school.”

“Yes, to be sure, I’m glad Christmas is coming; but I like school too,” said Maggie, stanchly. “I don’t want to grow up a dunce; and, besides, I shouldn’t know what to do with myself, staying at home all the time.”

“Shouldn’t you?” said Nelly, disdainfully. “Indeed I should, then. I’d do fancy work; embroider my under-clothes. I hate to wear plain things, and mother says it’s all nonsense, and won’t do it for me. And then I’d practise doing my hair after the patterns in the fashion-plates. O, I do love to see hair done up in new styles, and when I’m a young lady, I’ll never wear mine the same way twice.”

Nelly tossed her glossy black head with a proud consciousness of having beautiful hair *outside* of it, which was to her of a great deal more importance than the quantity of brains *inside* of the same; and Maggie looked half admiring, and half doubtful, and said, —

“I don’t think I should care to take so much trouble.”

“Trouble? Better take trouble about your looks than about those stupid lessons, *I* think,” said Nelly, in her usual pert, positive way. “And that reminds me, Maggie: how are you going to wear *your* hair to-morrow?”

“To-morrow? to the school reception? I don’t know. I haven’t thought about it; just as it is now, I suppose, only with my new net on.”

“O, but nets are so old-fashioned now — don’t you know? Do have it put up in papers, or something. *I’m* going to wear mine, as I did at my birthday party, all loose down my back — French style, you know. I’ve had it braided up tight for a week, and to-morrow it’ll crinkle beautifully, and it comes away below my waist. If it only was the fashionable color, — *golden*, you know, — I’d be so glad! But I can’t help it; and anyhow, I expect the fashion will change before I’m grown, and everybody be wishing for black hair.”

“O, Nelly, fashion in the color of one’s hair!” said Maggie, laughing, but secretly pleased to think that *her* hair, even if it was too short to “crinkle,” and wear floating over her shoulders, was of the “stylish” color — a true sunny yellow.

“Yes, indeed, fashion in everything, nowa-

days," said Nelly, with an air of conscious superiority to simple-minded little Maggie. "But you haven't told me what dress you're going to wear to-morrow."

"My Sunday one, of course. You know it — a blue and green plaid poplin; and I've a ribbon to match for my hair."

"*What!*" exclaimed Nelly, in surprise and disdain; "going to wear that dull, woollen thing to a public reception? Why, Maggie Lang! I shouldn't think of wearing *my* church dress, though it's a bright red merino, and a great deal more suitable than yours. *I* am going to wear my white Swiss, the one I had made for my party, with my bronze boots, and my corn-colored sash."

"Well, Nelly, you'll freeze. Your mother'll never let you."

"No, I shan't freeze; the school-rooms are warm, and my hair'll be as thick as a shawl over my shoulders. As for my mother, *I'll* manage that."

Nelly nodded her smart little head, with a knowing look, and Maggie, still unconvinced, objected.

"But, Nelly, no one else will wear white, I

am sure ; and how queer you'll feel being the only one ! ”

“ Sure, are you ? Well, then, I'll just tell you something ; but mind, it's a secret, and you mustn't tell. When Miss Kavanagh sent me into the front room for a ball of twine, a while ago, I saw ever so many of the first class girls standing under the chandelier, fixing a wreath. I passed close to them, and they didn't see me, and I stopped to hear what they were saying ; and Annie Arthur said, ‘ I'm going to wear a white alpaca ; ’ and Sue Remsen said *she* was going to wear a white barège ; and Lucy Grant said she had a light blue grenadine. So you see, Miss Maggie, the girls in the first class are going to dress in party style, and *I* shall do the same. They think they're very smart, and that they'll come here to-morrow looking better than any one else ; but they'll find I'm too sharp for them. And if I were you, Maggie, I would be so too ; I'd wear a light dress of some kind, and not be like the little dowdies in the lower classes.”

Maggie shook her head sorrowfully, and her childish blue eyes looked ready to fill with tears. This was dreadful, to look like a dowdy, she thought.

“I’ve got a beautiful white muslin,” she said ;
“but I know my mother won’t let me wear it.”

“Wear it without her knowing it, then ; that’s what *I* expect to have to do,” said Nelly, boldly ; and then, seeing her companion’s look of consternation, she added, hastily, “O, that’s only my fun ; of course I wouldn’t do such a thing. I mean, *coax* your mother, as I intend to ;” and then she began to empty her lap of the bits and twigs of greens.

“I’m tired of working at this stupid wreath. I’m going to ask Miss Kavanagh to let me help her,” she said, and went hastily off, leaving poor little Maggie alone at her desk, and very low-spirited indeed.

CHAPTER II.

POOR little Maggie! good-tempered and right-principled though she was, she had some feminine vanity, and liked to look as well as her neighbors. So the idea of sitting in her high plaid frock beside her desk-mate, all gorgeous in white muslin and corn-colored ribbons, took all the pleasure out of her anticipations of the morrow, and she felt as if she had almost rather not come to the reception at all.

She had no faith in the "coaxing" which Nelly had suggested. She knew her mother always considered carefully the right and propriety of a matter, and was not apt to change her mind when once it was made up. Still she knew also that her mother liked to make her little daughter happy; and while there was life there was hope; so with this comforting thought simple little Maggie brightened up, and went on with her wreath, wishing, meanwhile, that the time for dismissal would come soon, that she

might hurry home, and make an appeal to her mother's heart on the matter that lay nearest her own.

She was heartily glad when it was all over, the wreaths, the emblems, and the mottoes all put up, and the great rooms left to the janitors to be swept and dusted for the morrow. Even then, however, she could not go home, for Miss Kavanagh wanted her class to come into the library, and rehearse the "piece," as the children called it, which was to form their share in the entertainment of the visitors at the reception.

It was Poe's famous poem of "The Bells;" and each verse, the Sledging Bells, the Wedding Bells, the Fire Bells, and the Funeral Bells, was to be recited by a different girl, selected for the purpose, while the whole class chimed in most musically, in the "tintinnabulation" of the bells in the chorus.

Nelly Morgan had the verse about the Funeral Bells. Her voice was uncommonly deep and strong for a little girl, and she rolled out the solemn lines, —

"Hear the tolling of the bells,
Iron bells!

What a world of solemn thought
Their monody compels!" —

in a hollow, resonant tone, which was really very expressive, and added greatly to the effect of the recitation.

Maggie Lang, with her merry blue eyes, and bright, silvery voice, was the very one for the merry sledging bells; and it was really quite a musical treat to hear her repeat the crisp, ringing lines,—

“How they tinkle, tinkle, tinkle,
On the icy air of night,
While the stars that oversprinkle
All the heavens, seem to twinkle
In a crystalline delight,” —

and then the whole class chime in, —

“Keeping time, time, time,” —

and so on, through the whole of the wonderful and fascinating poem.

Indeed, all the parts had been carefully distributed and diligently practised, and Miss Kavanagh seemed quite satisfied with the success of the rehearsal this afternoon.

“Be sure you all come early to-morrow morning,” she said, as the girls bade her good afternoon, “and we’ll try this over once more before

the exercises begin, just to make sure that none of your little bells have lost their tongues!" And they all laughed, and promised they would be on the spot, and up to time; and then they ran off, eager to tell their mothers how beautiful the rooms looked, and what a grand time they were sure to have at the Christmas Eve celebration.

Maggie Lang only started off with a slow step and a heavy heart; for, impatient as she had been to get home and prefer her request, now that the time had come, she felt really ashamed to ask of her mother what she felt in her own wise little heart was such a very silly and imprudent thing. Her clouded face, as she entered the house, was so unlike her usual sunny looks, that her mother noticed it at once, and asked, in surprise, what had happened, and what ever Santa Claus would say to such a doleful phiz as that on the day before Christmas Eve.

But Maggie did not smile at this jest, as she would ordinarily have done; she pouted a little instead, and rejoined, rather pertly, —

"There's no such person as Santa Claus, at all. I should think I ought to know that, when I'm eleven years old. And, besides, Miss Kavanagh told us all about Christmas this afternoon,

and the true reason why it ought to be such a happy time ; and it was a great deal nicer than about any Santa Claus."

Mrs. Lang looked at her little daughter in surprise at her sharp, almost disrespectful tone ; but she saw the troubled look in the usually sunshiny face, and how the blue eyes were all misty with tears, bravely kept back, but waiting their chance to shower down. So she uttered no word of reproof, but said, gravely, —

"I am very glad, Maggie, to think that you understand what should make the real joy of Christmas ; but I should like, too, to see that you feel it. You don't look very happy this afternoon. What has happened?"

Maggie colored with shame at her own pettishness and her mother's kindness, and one bright tear forced itself out, and twinkled on her eyelash. Still she tried to answer in an indifferent tone, —

"O, nothing has happened ; only Nelly Morgan has made me feel as if I was going to look so mean at the reception to-morrow. She's going to wear her Swiss muslin, and she says all the girls in the first class intend to wear white too, and I expect ever so many will in our

division ; and I'd rather stay at home, for I don't want to look like a dowdy, in a thick, dark dress ; and I think you might let me, mother, now ! ”

“ Might let you what ? ” answered Mrs. Lang, scarcely able to keep from laughing at the puckered up face, and the incoherent speech poured out faster and faster, and ending at last in that almost spasmodic “ now,” which was a great word with Maggie when she was excited.

“ Might let me wear my white dress, too,” said Maggie, half laughing herself, amid her tears.

“ That is to say, might let you have a first-rate chance to get the croup, and the diphtheria, and the pneumonia, and the pleurisy, and I don't know how many more terrible things in those great, chilly rooms to-morrow ! Why, Maggie, your father would think we were both crazy if you were to come down to breakfast in a low white dress ! ”

“ But, mother, Nelly said — ”

“ But, Maggie, Nelly said a great deal more than she knew, no doubt. I don't believe the teachers will allow any such nonsense and imprudence at school to-morrow, and I want you to have as much faith in your mother as in such

a vain and silly girl as I'm sorry to say I think Nelly Morgan is. I never sent you anywhere yet looking 'like a dowdy'—did I, Maggie?"

"N-no, but—" said Maggie, hesitatingly; but her mother interrupted her, cheerily,—

"Then trust me that I shall not do it to-morrow either; and now, if you have got nicely warm, I'll tell you what we will do. We'll go out to the florist's, and see if we can't have him make up a pretty bouquet for you to take to Miss Kavanagh to-morrow. You say all the teachers have them—don't they? Would you like that?"

The clouds cleared up on Maggie's face in a moment; the rain-drops dried, and the sun shone out as bright as ever.

"O, mother, how nice of you!" she exclaimed, in delight; "I never gave Miss Kavanagh anything, and she's so kind! O, that's a great deal nicer than wearing a white dress; and there shall be roses, and geraniums, and heliotrope, and everything!—shan't there, mother?"

"Not quite everything, I'm afraid, Maggie," said her mother, smiling, "but whatever you like best in Mr. Budd's greenhouse; and now

you mind baby, and I will go and put my things on."

So Maggie sat down, with her foot on the rocker, happy as could be, while Mrs. Lang went to her room glad at heart that at least her little daughter was not sullen or selfish.

CHAPTER III.

MEANWHILE, Nelly Morgan, as she walked home from school, was arranging a very artful plan in her own mind for the carrying out of her wished-for project. She knew that her mother would not consent, any more than Maggie's, for her to run the risk of taking a serious cold by making such a decided change in her dress in midwinter; but yet she was quite determined in some way, by fair means if possible, if not, by foul, to fulfil her purpose, and enjoy the triumph of dazzling the whole school by her brilliant toilet, and proving to the older girls, whose ranks she ardently desired to join, that, if she *did* only belong to the second class, she was quite as much of a young lady as the tallest of them.

How fortunate it was, she thought, as she went slowly along by herself, not joining any of the groups of merry chattering girls, nor stopping to look in at any of the bright shop windows, so

tempting just now in the glory of their Christmas adornment, — how fortunate that her little baby brother was only a week old, and so her mother could not be present at the reception, nor even leave her room to superintend Nelly's dressing in the morning!

“I'm always lucky,” thought Nelly, exultingly; “but that's the luckiest thing that ever did happen to me. “*She'll* never know what I wear; and now, if I can only manage to keep Anne out of the way, and those troublesome little young ones, — Jennie and Frank, — why, I shall be all right. And I *will* manage it somehow or other — see if I don't. But first, I've got to be terribly good, and put everybody in a good humor!”

By the time she had reached this virtuous conclusion, Nelly found herself at her own door, and was about to run up the steps and ring the bell as usual. Then she remembered her idea of putting everybody in a good humor, and turned and went in at the basement door. When she got in the hall, she made such a noise wiping her feet on the door mat, that Anne, the servant, came to the kitchen door to see what it was.

“Dear me! how very careful yiz are all of a sudden, miss!” she said, as she saw Nelly busily cleaning her shoes. “An’ you raally did manage to come in the airy way, an’ save me the throuble of answerin’ the dhoor—did yiz?”

“O, well, it’s Christmas times, and people ought to be obliging, Anne, you know,” answered Nelly, with a smile of pretended good-nature; and the Irish girl said, “Yis; blissed be the howly Christ for it,” and went back to her work, thinking Miss Nelly must surely have “met with a change.”

Very lightly, so as to make no noise, Nelly ran up stairs, and, laying off her cloak and hat in her own room, went straight to her mother’s. Very softly she opened the door, to show how careful she was not to disturb either mother or baby if they should be asleep; and very gently she went up to the bedside, and inquired how they were, and if baby had had any more colic, or mother any more backache, and what there was that she could do for either of them.

It was not usually Nelly’s way to be so thoughtful and tender, and Mrs. Morgan was pleased to see her little daughter so affectionate and ready to

be of use. So she gave her the baby, who was a little fretful, to hold for a while ; and Nelly sat in a low chair by the fire, nursing the little soft, wriggling thing on her lap, cooing to it, and caressing it, and, between whiles, amusing her mother with a description of the day at school, the making of wreaths, and trimming of rooms, while her mother looked on, and listened, and was pleased to see Nelly so kind and cheerful.

The “troublesome little young ones,” too, — Jennie and Frank, — who were too small to go to the great public school, but belonged to a little “kindergarten” nearer home, gathered round her chair to hear what she was saying, and to tell in their eager way about the Christmas doings that were to take place at their own school ; and Nelly did not seem to find them troublesome at all, but listened with an appearance of interest to all they had to say, and talked to them in a low tone, which had the effect of quieting them.

Then, when the little wee baby had wriggled and “snoozled” itself to sleep, and Mrs. Morgan began to look rather tired with all the talking, she laid the little live bundle softly back in the bed, and invited the children so pleasantly to come down to the sitting-room with her, and

hear all about Kriss Kringle, that they went off at once in delight, and Mrs. Morgan turned on her pillow to take a little nap before her husband should come home, thinking what a good daughter Nelly could be when she tried, and hoping that during the coming new year she would perhaps try oftener.

When Nelly got down stairs, however, out of her mother's sight, her extraordinary good-nature proved very short-lived. She soon grew tired of talking to Frank and Jennie, and began to find them "troublesome young ones" again; and after answering, in a rather impatient way, some of their innumerable questions about "St. Nick," she summed up the whole matter by reading to them, as fast as she could speak, their favorite poem, —

"'Twas the night before Christmas," —

and then, coaxing them to go off to the nursery, she set them down to building towers and castles with their blocks.

When she saw them really busy and interested, she breathed a long sigh of relief, and saying to herself, "Thank goodness! now I can go and attend to my own affairs for a little while!" she

slipped softly away across the hall to the "spare room," and proceeded to make sure of no interruptions by locking the door. When all was secure, she moved quietly over the floor, so as not to attract the attention of her mother, whose room was just below, and paused in front of the bureau. She hesitated a moment, and then, saying half aloud, as if to encourage herself,— "Pooh! who cares? they're my own things, and I've a right to do what I please with 'em!" she opened one of the drawers, and took out a large package, carefully pinned up in tissue-paper. Unfastening this, she shook out of its folds the pretty muslin dress which had been made for a birthday party, and never worn since.

After stopping to admire it a good while, and to think, with a flush on her cheek and a flash in her eyes, how she would outshine all her class to-morrow, and how envious Maggie Lang would be, she spread it out carefully on the high, white bed, and turned to the drawer again. She took out next the pretty bronze boots, the worked stockings, the broad sash, and little embroidered handkerchief, which belonged to the costume, handling each article of finery with tender touch,

and gazing upon it with fond, proud eyes, as though it was the object of her dearest affection.

They were laid carefully, one by one, upon the bed beside the gauzy pile of muslin that lay there like a white cloud ; and then Nelly took out still another parcel from the drawer, which was the shrine of her most precious possessions. Very delicately she unpinned the wrappings of soft paper, and revealed to view the wreath of pink daisies, the white gloves, and dainty little silk fan, which had been the gifts of an indulgent auntie, on the grand occasion of Nelly's first party. She looked at these with longing eyes, and wished she only might dare venture to wear them. She even tried the wreath over her black braids, and stood before the glass, fluttering the little feathery fan, and putting on all the airs of a mincing young lady ; but, delightful as was the view to Nelly's self-admiring eyes, her common sense interfered to prevent her from being too ridiculous.

"Ah, no ! I suppose it really *won't* do to wear a wreath and white gloves to the school-house ; and as for the fan, I'm afraid it will be rather too chilly for me to need it," she de-

cided at last ; and so, with a long sigh, and with loving, lingering fingers, she pinned them again into their folds of tissue paper, and placed them back in the drawer.

There were still her clean underclothes to be laid out ; and by the time all was ready the teabell rang, and Nelly started, like a guilty thing, and hastened out of the room at once, locking the door carefully behind her, and almost flying down stairs, so as to be at the table ready to pour out her father's tea before any one could possibly inquire where she was.

Her hand trembled a little as she lifted the cup, for she was conscious of a wrong and secret purpose ; but she had presence of mind enough to control her agitation, and to remember just how much milk and how many lumps of sugar her father liked in his tea. She waited on him so nicely, and was so kind to the children, that Mr. Morgan was quite pleased, and said it was almost as good as having the dear mother herself at the table ; and Nelly's face flushed at his praise, half in pride, half in shame, as she remembered how she was only acting a part, and all the time plotting in her heart to deceive both him and the mother who lay ill and helpless in her bed.

This thought did not serve to weaken her purpose, however; and she went on carrying out her plan of being very kind and useful, and making it difficult to suspect her of doing wrong. She arranged her mother's tea nicely on a tray, and carried it up to her herself; then took the baby while the nurse went down to get her own supper; and by and by, when little Jennie said she was sleepy, she offered at once to put her to bed, and was altogether so thoughtful and so good that everybody was quite delighted; and Mrs. Morgan said she did not feel so very badly now about being sick, and leaving the house entirely to the tender mercies of Annie.

As Nelly kissed her mother good night, she said, in an indifferent tone, as though it were a matter of very little consequence to her, —

“I suppose it doesn't make any difference to you, mother, does it, what I wear to-morrow?” And her mother, suspecting nothing, said, kindly, —

“O, no, my dear; wear just what you like — only be sure that you look neat and tidy.”

Nelly's black eyes sparkled with triumph as she heard these words. She knew very well that her mother did not dream of her wearing a

thin white dress, but merely meant to allow her to choose from her winter wardrobe — her scarlet merino, or her last year's plaid, or even the blue checked silk, which was her best summer dress, but was made high, with long sleeves, and, therefore, warm enough in a warm room. But Nelly did not care for the real *truth* of the matter: all she wanted was some *word* from her mother which she could claim as an excuse if she were ever detected in what she intended to do; and having got this word, she felt safe, and gave no thought either to the right or the wrong.

So her heart was full of nothing but pride in the success of her cunning plot, and of gratified vanity as she stood before the mirror in her room, in her night dress, unbraiding her thick black hair, and screwing it up again into tighter plaits than ever, that it might be sure to "crinkle" well to-morrow.

No thought of the real meaning of Christmas came into her mind; no remembrance of Miss Kavanagh's talk, only that afternoon, about the heavenly Babe who came to earth, not arrayed in fine raiment, and dwelling in kings' palaces, but —

“Meanly wrapped in swaddling bands,
And in a manger laid.”

No thought of the Savior, who had given up the glories of heaven to wander about the earth, homeless and poor, clad in coarse garments, “despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief,” all for her sake, and that of sinners like her. No; no thought of anything but her own silly vanity; and she laid her head upon her pillow and went to sleep, to dream of the morrow’s triumph, with never a prayer to Him who alone could preserve her through the dark night, and add another morrow to her life.

CHAPTER IV.

WHEN Nelly awoke next morning, it was broad daylight; and she sprang out of bed, and began to dress as quickly as possible, for she had two toilets to make, and a great deal of *managing* to do, and it was necessary to have plenty of time. As soon as she was ready she went down stairs to hurry Anne with the breakfast, and then flew up again to hasten the dressing of the children. She was so energetic that she inspired every one else to be brisk, and by half past seven she had them all seated at the table, and everything going on famously. Only once she was a little disconcerted, when her father, noticing that she wore her every-day dress, said, —

“Why, how’s this, little woman? I thought I should see you come out as a red bird this morning! Isn’t there some sort of fandango at school to-day?”

But she answered, quickly, “O, yes, there is;

but I was afraid I might soil my dress pouring the coffee—or something ;” and Mr. Morgan only smiled at her extra carefulness, and never noticed how hastily she spoke, or how her cheeks burned as red as the scarlet dress.

Breakfast was over at last ; her father gone off to his business, her mother’s tray sent up, and the children coaxed to go and play in the nursery ; and Nelly was free to run up to the spare room, and begin again to offer her devotions at the shrine of vanity.

She had no time now to linger to admire either her finery or herself. Her shoes were exchanged rapidly for the delicate bronze boots ; her hair let down in a black, rippling mass over her shoulders, and the white muslin dress duly put on. She had hard work managing the hooks and eyes, the clasps of her coral, and the bow of her sash, alone ; but perseverance conquers all things, and Nelly’s persistence was worthy of a better cause. She overcame every difficulty by patient effort, and was all ready before nine o’clock, even to the rubber boots, which were to conceal her thin shoes, and the water-proof cloak, which was long and full, and covered her dress entirely.

The only thing now was to get off without her deception being detected ; and this was not difficult, as it happened. The children were safe in the nursery ; Anne was busy clearing up the breakfast things ; nurse was dressing the baby ; and only her mother was at liberty to notice her dress. This, however, Nelly did not intend to give her a chance to do. Drawing up the hood of her water-proof over her head, gathering in all the mass of waving hair, she ran down stairs as if in the greatest haste, just put her head in at her mother's door, and saying, breathlessly, —

“ Good by, mother ! I haven't a minute to stop ! Miss Kavanagh wants us for something particular, and I'm late already ! ” was off down the stairs, and out of the front door, never stopping to hear her mother's kind “ Well, my dear, good by, and be sure to have a nice time.”

How merry and Christmas-like the streets looked as Nelly stepped out upon them ! — the white snow lying everywhere ; the sleighs dashing swiftly by with jingling bells ; the people hurrying along with eager faces, already busy with the Christmas Eve shopping ; the windows gay with all manner of pretty things, and surrounded by admiring groups of children.

But Nelly didn't stop to look to the right hand or the left. She would not feel quite safe until she was really in the school-room; and so she hurried on, scarcely stopping to take breath, until she found herself within the school-house, and away up stairs in the long wardrobe, where the girls took off their wrappings before entering the class-rooms. The merry hum of voices within showed Nelly that she was one of the last comers; and she took off her cloak in a hurry, her cheeks flushing quick with gratified vanity at the murmur of surprise that broke from the two or three stragglers in the wardrobe. She took it for admiration and envy; and, noticing that they had on high dark dresses and high boots, she felt quite a friendly pity for them. She only stopped to shake out the folds of her gauzy dress, to settle her sash, and to give one or two final twitches to her curls, and then, with glowing cheeks and sparkling eyes, she marched proudly into the school-room.

It was not quite nine yet, and none of the classes were in order. The girls were scattered here and there, laughing and chatting; the teachers were standing in a group, talking to each other; and naturally every one looked round at

the rustle of such an imposing entrance as Nelly's. She fluttered up the long, narrow aisle, through rows of staring children, to her own class-room, quite conscious that every eye was upon her, and quite delighted with the consciousness. She spread out her stiff skirts as she sat down, as a peacock spreads his tail, and looked round her with as complacent an air as that conceited bird is assumed always to wear; but the next moment her look of satisfied vanity was suddenly changed to one of surprise and chagrin.

The rooms were filled with girls; all the young ladies of the first class were present, and, to Nelly's amazement and mortification, not one of them was dressed in white. There was every variety of color, — blue, and green, and crimson, purple, and garnet, and fawn, — but all made high, with sleeves to the wrist; and she alone found herself fluttering in gauzy-white draperies, with uncovered neck and arms.

Now, Nelly was vain enough to like to *surpass* other girls; but she was not independent enough to like to be entirely different from them; and even if they had not all stared and tittered so, she would have found it very unpleasant to be so conspicuously singular on such a public occasion.



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But then they *did* stare and titter very much indeed, as school-girls will, no matter how much they are lectured; and the glow of triumph on Nelly's face quickly deepened into a burning blush of shame and anger as she caught one and another teasing whisper from those around her.

"I say, girls," said one little mischief in Nelly's own class, "we've made a mistake; this is a full-dress party, not a school reception; the shutters will be closed, and the gas lighted presently; we'd better hurry home, and get on our kids while there is time."

Of course this sally, though not very brilliant, set the girls into a giggle, and another and another uttered some comical speech, which Nelly could not help hearing; and the children, full of fun and spirits, would laugh and draw away, pretending they were afraid of crushing her finery, until the quick-tempered girl could stand it no longer. She sprang up from her seat, her eyes snapping, and her cheeks flaming with anger, and cried out, in a rage, —

"You're a poor, mean, miserable set; you've got nothing fit to wear yourselves, and you're only jealous of those who have. I shall go

right home, and tell my mother of you. And you may get along the best you can with your piece, for I won't stay to say it with you — now !”

And in a moment she had swept down the aisle, and slammed out of the door.

The teachers looked round at the noise, and Miss Kavanagh came down the room to see what was the matter in her class. The girls all began to speak at once, and it was some time before she could quiet them in their excitement, and find out the true state of the case. When she discovered that Nelly Morgan, for whom she had been waiting to begin her rehearsal, had really come and gone again, with the determination not to return, she was very much annoyed and perplexed.

“Dear, dear ! what is to be done ?” she said, in a vexed tone. “Didn't you know, girls, as often as you have been told, that it was very rude to laugh at a companion for anything ? You had much better have come and told me she was here, and I would have made her put on a scarf, or something, and we would have gone on with our rehearsal. Now we shall have to give up our exercise altogether, for we can't possibly do

without her. I depended on her not only for her own verse, but to lead the chorus, and I shall not undertake it without her."

"O, O, Miss Kavanagh!" began a chorus of disappointed voices; and Maggie Lang jumped up and said, "I know where she lives, Miss Kavanagh; let me run after her and coax her, or beg her mother to send her back. I'll tell her we're all sorry, and I'll be sure to bring her. May I go, please?"

"O, yes, Miss Kavanagh, let her go, please!" echoed the chorus of voices again; but their teacher hesitated.

"I never like to send my scholars on errands, you know," she said, "and it is within a minute of nine o'clock; but, as you all feel so badly about giving up your recitation, you may go, for once, Maggie. I don't think it will be of any use, however; Mrs. Morgan will naturally be offended at the way in which Nelly was treated. I hope it will be a lesson to you all. It is a very vexatious affair altogether."

Miss Kavanagh looked thoroughly displeased as she rose to go and inform the principal that the exercise of her class would probably have to be omitted from the programme. Maggie Lang

slipped quietly out on her errand, and the other girls waited her return in very uncomfortable silence.

Meanwhile the principal's bell rang for order, and the little buzz and flutter ceased throughout the rooms, and each class presented a beautiful array of silent and motionless girls, prettily dressed, and with bright, expectant faces. Visitors began to pour in from the lower rooms, where they had been attending the Christmas exercises of the male department; the audience-room was soon filled with parents and friends of the pupils, and the trustees of the school; and the business of the morning began with a merry song of welcome, which the whole tuneful throng, numbering hundreds of girls, sang standing to the spirited accompaniment of the piano. Under cover of all this burst of song, and screened from view by the rows of tall girls in the front classes, little Maggie slipped up the long aisle, and, in a low voice, reported the success of her mission to her teacher.

"I went to Nelly's house," she said, half out of breath with the haste she had made, "and I asked the girl at the door if I couldn't see Nelly. And she looked astonished, and said Nelly was

gone to school long ago ; and I told her, yes, but she had gone home again ; and she said she was sure she wasn't in the house, for she couldn't have come in without her hearing her. And she said she hoped Nelly wasn't up to any mischief, for her mother was very sick, and it would worry her so much.* So I thought I wouldn't say any more, for fear she'd tell Mrs. Morgan, and make her worse ; and so I said, maybe there was some mistake, and came right back. But it's too bad — isn't it, Miss Kavanagh, for Nelly to behave so, and for us to lose saying our pretty piece, after we've taken so much trouble practising it ?”

“ It is too bad,” said Miss Kavanagh, looking both vexed and anxious ; “ and I only hope, too, that Nelly may not be doing anything wrong. I can scarcely believe that Mrs. Morgan — but no matter ;” and she checked herself suddenly, not thinking it right to communicate her suspicions to her pupils. “ At any rate we shall have to give up our recitation ; and I do hope it will be a lesson to you all to make you remember the Golden Rule a little better. No matter how ridiculous any of you might ever chance to appear, — you would not like to be laughed at any more than Nelly.”

Maggie withdrew to her seat, looking very crestfallen; for, though she had *said* nothing teasing to Nelly, she had joined in the general laugh raised by the whole class at the sight of her finery and her airs. She had felt, too, a little throb of exultation to think that it was *Nelly*, and not herself, as Nelly had predicted, who had appeared ridiculous in the eyes of the school; but now she felt ashamed to remember that she had indulged such a wrong feeling, and thought sorrowfully how poor a way this was to enter upon the *real* joy of Christmas, of which Miss Kavanagh had talked only yesterday.

The rest of the class, who were still standing, singing their song of welcome, had, however, kept their eyes fixed upon their teacher and Maggie; and, although they could not hear what was said, they read very plainly on their faces the fate of their share in the day's entertainment. The ill-tidings were confirmed by a decided shake of Miss Kavanagh's head in reply to their eager looks of inquiry as they took their seats; and, though they had to accept their disappointment in silence, the pleasure was all gone out of the morning for them, and a very dark cloud hung over the usually bright-faced and orderly second division.

And yet it was a very pleasant reception. There were a great many guests, and they were entertained by recitations and declamations, compositions and dialogues, music of all kinds, —grave and gay,—solos, duets, and chorals; and, prettiest of all, with graceful and healthful exercises in calisthenics. The two hours sped rapidly away, and the final addresses had been made, all sorts of nice compliments and Christmas greetings been paid to teachers and pupils, and the visitors had taken their departure; every face was full of smiles and Christmas cheer, and every one in high good humor, except the unfortunate second class.

They felt decidedly *cheated*, and looked disconsolate enough in the midst of the general complacency. They brightened up a little, however, when, after all the guests had departed, and only the pupils remained in their seats waiting for dismissal, Mr. Thurston, the chairman of the school committee, rose on the platform, and said he had just one more word to whisper in their ear. The little stir and bustle in the room was quieted at once, for the children always liked to hear what Mr. Thurston had to say. He had such a good and genial face, such pleasant blue

eyes, and such a cordial smile, that one could not but be sure of his having a kind heart; then he always talked so that they could understand him, never forgetting to throw in a merry word to brighten them in the midst of his good advice. So, though they were often horribly bored by the pompous, stupid harangues which were frequently inflicted upon them by gentlemen visitors, they were never tired of listening to Mr. Thurston.

And, indeed, they could not well help being interested to-day, for his "one word more" was to tell them that he and the whole committee had been very much pleased with what they had heard of their industry and good conduct during the past term; and that now, as Christmas was at hand, when every one was expected to feel happy, and as the committee wished the children to have the pleasantest of associations connected with their school, these gentlemen had provided an entertainment, different, it was true, but he trusted quite as agreeable, as the feast of reason and the flow of soul which the children had furnished to them that morning. If the teachers would allow them to adjourn to the play-room below, he thought they would make

a discovery which could not fail to give them pleasure ; that is, if they were anything like him, when he was a little boy, or a little girl either, for that matter.

Applause was rather contrary to the order of things in a public school ; but this was too much for the children's powers of restraint. Moreover, Christmas was a privileged time, and with one accord, as Mr. Thurston finished speaking, the children started in their seats ; eager hands went clap, clap, clap ! glad feet went stamp, stamp, stamp ! and a good, generous hurrah ! for the committee, with a tiger for the chairman, rang from room to room of the great building.

The gentlemen bowed their acknowledgments, and a touch of the principal's bell restored silence at once. With eager, beaming faces the school waited for orders ; a teacher took her place at the piano, and struck up the liveliest of marches ; and class by class, in regular military order, though on the double-quick, filed down the long staircases, away, away down to the very ground floor, where an immense play-room occupied the entire space.

This had been gayly decorated with evergreens by men whom the committee had sent there the

evening before ; and that very morning, while the children were busy with their songs, their speeches, and their gymnastics, a whole army of waiters had been just as busy, putting up impromptu tables, covering them with cloths, and spreading them with all manner of Christmas cheer.

There were turkeys — O, how many ! — just as many as eight hundred children could possibly dispose of ; and geese and chickens besides ; mince pies, and pumpkin pies, and apple pies ; baskets full of cake, and others heaped with motto candies, nuts and raisins, oranges and apples ; and just as much lemonade as any one wanted. Many of the children had never sat down to such a feast before ; and never did Christmas Eve shine upon happier faces than were gathered round those long tables in the great school play-room.

The gentlemen of the committee staid and took luncheon with the children, and felt themselves fully repaid for their generosity in witnessing the pleasure they had given. The principal and teachers were also there, of course, to share the feast, and keep the youngsters from being entirely carried away by their high spirits.

Not that there was much effort at *order* at-

tempted, however. When the repast was concluded, and every one had eaten as much as he wished, and each child had been furthermore delighted with the present of an orange, and a cornucopia of candy, to take home to a little brother or sister, the waiters came in again, and packed up the dishes in great baskets, and carried them off. Then the boys fell to work, and took apart the tables, which were only boards laid upon trestles; and in double-quick time the great room was cleared, and the word was given that all who chose might remain an hour or two longer, and engage in whatever games they liked.

This announcement was received with another burst of applause; and, of course, every one chose to stay. The teachers, who enjoyed it all as much as the children, took a general superintendence of things, suggesting games, and separating the little ones from the great ones, so that they would be in no danger of being run down in the midst of the frolic. Very soon all manner of merry plays were going on all over the great hall. Of course, there were the old favorites, "Oats, peas, beans, and barley grow," "Sister, O Phœbe," "Here we tread the green grass," "Fox and geese," and so on; besides "Sell the button," "Turkish

merchant," and various "guessing games," for the quieter ones.

Everybody joined in, and everybody was in the best of humors; so that, altogether, it was one of the very happiest days that any of them could remember, even to the second class, who had forgotten all about the disappointment of the morning; and all went home in high spirits, delighted with their "Surprise Party," grateful to the gentlemen who had so kindly planned it for them, and prepared ever after to connect a most agreeable association of Christmas with school.

CHAPTER V.

AS the girls were gathered in the long wardrobes, putting on cloaks and hats, and chattering, like so many magpies, over the delights of that most delightful day, some one called out, —

“Here’s a pair of rubber boots, tucked up in the corner here; who owns them? Nobody? Well, then, let’s put them up at auction. Who bids for this fine pair of rubber boots, warranted to keep out everything?”

“Even the feet,” said another laughing girl, as the little mischief held the unclaimed boots high above her head; and another cried merrily, —

“Let’s settle it as they did about the little glass slipper. Let’s all try them on, and see who is the Cinderella amongst us.”

But by this time Maggie Lang had got a glimpse of the boots about to be so unceremoniously disposed of, and she recognized them at

once as belonging to her deskmate, Nelly Morgan.

“Have they got blue straps inside to pull them on with?” she asked: “yes, I thought so; I knew they were Nelly Morgan’s; I’ve seen her dry them at the register many a time. Give them to me, and I’ll take them home to her; she’ll be sure to want them before the holidays are over, and the school-house will be locked up, you know.”

“Take them home to her?” repeated one of the girls, in surprise. “Indeed, I wouldn’t take any such trouble for such a mean, disobliging creature.”

“Yes, if it hadn’t been for her, we wouldn’t have had to appear so stupid that we couldn’t take any part in the reception exercises,” said another; and still another chimed in with a laugh of ridicule.

“O, well, girls, she came in as the *show-piece*, you know. Everything is spectacular, nowadays, as my father says, when he puts on his glasses.”

A burst of laughter followed this brilliant sally from the “witty” young lady of the first class; and, under cover of the noise, Maggie went up and took possession of the boots.

It was too bad, thought the kind-hearted little girl, that poor Nelly should lose the use of her rubbers all through the holiday week, when she would want to be going out more than usual, and when the melting snow would be sure to make it muddy, as well as to have lost all the pleasure of that happy day. It must have been a very dull day to her, indeed, thought Maggie, going home with such bitter feelings as she had done, and not a bit like Christmas Eve. And she felt quite glad that she had an excuse to go round to Nelly's house, and tell her how sorry she felt, and perhaps cheer her up a little, by telling her what merry times they had had in the great play-room, and how much she had wished for her there. So she wrapped up the boots in a piece of paper, and started off with them tucked under her arm. She stopped at her own home first, of course, and ran up stairs to tell her mother all the wonderful history of the day; and Mrs. Lang was quite as much interested and pleased as Maggie could desire.

"I concluded something special must be going on at the school, when you staid so long," she said; "for I knew my Maggie would not go off anywhere else without asking mother. Well, it

certainly was very kind of Mr. Thurston and the other gentlemen ; and I hope you, for one, Maggie, will show that you remember it, by trying to be more diligent than ever next term. ‘Those horrid, horrid sums’ Maggie ;” and Mrs. Lang smiled significantly at her little daughter. Maggie colored a little, and answered, quickly, “Yes, indeed, mother, I shall study harder than ever, to please the gentlemen and dear Miss Kavanagh, too. O, mother, she was so pleased with the bouquet I brought her ; it was the prettiest one she had ; but, mother, she was vexed with me, too, to-day — with all of us ; and it was about the strangest thing. I’ll tell you all about it.”

So then came all the story of Nelly Morgan’s strange performances ; of her sudden appearance in glory, and her equally sudden disappearance in shame ; of Maggie’s going to her house, and not finding her there, and of the disappointment with regard to their recitation.

“So the bells didn’t ring in your class to-day, in spite of its being Christmas Eve !” said Mrs. Lang, with a smile, as Maggie finished her story ; but for all that, she looked grave, and in her own mind felt tolerably certain that there was something wrong connected with Nelly’s behavior.

She did not say so, however, and Maggie went on to tell about the finding of the rubbers. "I have them here, mother," she said, "and if you don't mind, I'd like to run round and take them to Nelly, and tell her how sorry I am she missed all the fun, and give her this paper of candy, if she'll have it. It's only four o'clock, and I won't stay long. May I go?"

Mrs. Lang hesitated a moment; she did not like to have her little daughter intimate with a girl who, she feared, was not possessed of very strict principles of right; but neither could she bear to check her in her kindly impulse; so she said, "Yes, you may go; but don't stay very long." And Maggie promised, and tying on her hood again, started off on her kindly errand.

We must hasten on before her, however, and find out how it has fared with Nelly all through this Christmas Eve, which she had thought was going to be such a proud and happy day. She was in such a tempest of rage when she rushed out of the school-room that she scarcely knew what she was doing. Her chief desire was to get away as quickly as possible from the scene of her mortification and disappointment; and she had thrown on her wraps, and rushed off

in such mad haste that she had entirely forgotten her overshoes ; nor did she remember them until, as she ran along the street, not noticing, in her blind passion, where she was going, she felt the snow, which lay in pools of melting slush on every crossing, penetrating the delicate kid of her pretty boots, and wetting her feet to the skin. Then she remembered, in consternation, that water would spoil the bright bronze coloring ; and, looking down at her feet, she discovered, to her despair, that her beautiful shoes were entirely ruined !

Tears of sorrow and of fear rushed to her eyes. Her beautiful bronze boots ! — they were so handsome, and so costly ! She had never had such a pair before, and they fitted her so perfectly, and every one admired them so much ! How could she bear to give them up ? And, worst of all, how could she account to her mother for their condition ? how could she tell her of the deception she had practised upon her, and of the mortification in which it had ended ?

“ It will never do ; she would tell father, and he would be, O, so angry ! ” thought the unhappy girl, still hastening along the sloppy streets, and trying to force back her tears, that people might

not stare at her for crying. "I must hide them away when I get home, and I must try somehow or other to earn the money to buy another pair just like them. I can knit sontags and breakfast shawls, and I'll take the dollar my father always gives me at Christmas to buy the worsted for the first one. Thank fortune, they're party shoes, and mother won't know but that they're safe in the drawer. I only hope I shan't be asked to a single party this winter."

With this not very cheering hope for her only comfort, the miserable girl reached her home, and stole in at the basement door, trembling for fear that Anne should suddenly come out of the kitchen, and starting like a guilty thing at every sound she heard. She met no one, however, on her way up stairs. The children had not yet returned from their little school, and the nurse was taking care of Mrs. Morgan and the baby in their own room; so that Nelly made her way, unseen and unheard, up to the empty guest chamber, which had been the scene of her triumphant vanity only an hour or two before.

There, with very different feelings from those with which she had put them on, she took off her fine clothes, and began to lay them, with tears of

shame and anger, back in the drawer. But when she went to fold up her dress, she found not only that it was considerably tumbled by the heavy cloak, but that — worse and worse — the inside of the hem, all across the back breadth, was spotted with mud which had splashed up underneath in her mad race home through the slush.

This was too much, and Nelly dropped, all undressed as she was, into a chair, and sobbed aloud. What *should* she do with this fresh misfortune? The shoes she might possibly replace; but how could she ever account to her mother for the splashes on a dress which, as she supposed, had never been worn out of the house? She did not dare wash them off, for Swiss muslin always showed when it had been washed, as it lost in the water the peculiar pale bluish tinge which it has when new; besides, the starch would come out, and that breadth would look all limp and unlike the others; and O, her mother would be sure to notice the difference, and what *should* she do? Poor Nelly! it never occurred to her to do the only safe, because the only *right* thing — go to her mother, acknowledge her fault, tell all its unhappy consequences, and ask forgiveness, in real penitence of heart, and determination never to attempt to deceive again.

It did not occur to Nelly because she did not *feel* real sorrow for her fault ; she only felt anger at the failure of her plans, and fear of discovery ; and she attached so much more importance to fine dress herself than to truth and honor, that she could not believe her mother would be willing to let the accident to the shoes and the frock pass unpunished, merely because she was honest enough to confess how it had happened. She had not yet experienced the truth of the sweet promise, —

“If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

And thus she felt only the cowardice of the guilty, with none of the trustful courage of the penitent and believing.

So, as the poor girl sat shivering in the cold, any way and every way except the *right* way of getting out of her trouble came into Nelly's mind. She could think of nothing better, however, than letting the mud dry on the dress, and then trying to rub it off with a brush. So she spread out the gauzy white skirt on the backs of two chairs, looked at it in a helpless sort of way, and then put on her every-day dress, and

wrapped her cloak around her ; for there was no fire in the spare room, and Nelly began to find it very cold indeed.

She did not dare, however, to go down into a warm room, for fear her mother would hear that she was at home, and want to know why she had left school so early. She did not even dare to walk about to keep herself warm, lest she should be heard ; and there was nothing for her to do but wrap her cloak tight around her, and sit down in the great cushioned rocking-chair, and tuck her poor little cold feet under her, to keep them from getting quite numb.

There were no books in the room that Nelly cared to read, no work, no playthings ; and O, how drearily this Christmas Eve passed by to the disappointed, and mortified, and anxious girl ! While her classmates were passing the hours so pleasantly, she had nothing to do but chafe her chilly hands, and look disconsolately at her ruined finery, and listen for every sound, every footfall, so as to spring and hide it away if any step should be heard approaching the room ; no companions but her own bitter, and angry, and fearful thoughts, and no memory of the day which was not inexpressibly painful.

And yet this was Christmas Eve, and held sacred by the whole Christian world, in memory of that wondrous Eve, hundreds of years ago, when the wise men beheld the Star in the East, that heralded the birth of the Prince of Peace, and when the angels sang the triumphant song, —

“On earth peace — good will to men!”

But there was no peace, no good will to men, in our poor foolish Nelly's heart that day.

Never was the sound of the great City Hall bell, booming out twelve o'clock, more welcome than it was to this poor little half-frozen prisoner of her own misdeeds; for that was the hour when school was to have been dismissed, and now she might appear before her mother without exciting any remark. The light splashes of mud on the dress were now quite dry, too; and Nelly took a clothes-brush from the bureau, and tried very carefully to rub them off. To her great relief, she was able to efface them almost entirely. Only a few slight stains remained, and Nelly trusted to her quick wit to prevent them from being noticed the next time she had occasion to wear the dress.

The shoes now remained to be disposed of.

These were still quite wet, and entirely discolored; and Nelly looked at them with a pang of regret, not for her sin, but for their loss. She had decided that the safest place in which to hide them was a certain hole in the plaster of the attic wall; and accordingly she stole up the narrow stairs in her stocking feet, creeping softly as a cat, and listening, and looking sharply, for fear that Anne might be up in her room and hear her.

But no sign of any one appeared, and Nelly climbed up on a chair, and thrust the proofs of her deception safe out of sight, drawing back her hand hastily, lest a hungry rat, mistaking it for a piece of cheese, might nibble a bit of it for his Christmas dinner. Then she crept down stairs again, folded away her dresses, tidied the room, and, taking her cloak and hood, closed the door, and stole softly down to the front hall. There she changed her manner very suddenly. She opened the street door and shut it again with a bang; burst out into a snatch of a Christmas carol, and then ran noisily up stairs, singing all the way, as though happy as a child ought to be on Christmas Eve. When she reached her

mother's door, she stopped her song, as though afraid of disturbing her or baby, and, turning the knob softly, she entered the room, and presented herself before her mother as having just arrived from school.

CHAPTER VI.

“WELL, my daughter,” said Mrs. Morgan, turning over in the bed, and greeting Nelly with a smile, “you come in singing; so I suppose you’ve had a very pleasant time. But, child,” she went on, as she noticed Nelly’s pale and strange looks, “you’re blue with the cold, and your teeth are chattering. Is it so very cold out?”

“It was chilly in the school-room,” answered Nelly, evasively; “but never mind me, mother; I’ll soon get warm here before your bright fire. How are you, and how is baby? I scarcely had time to peep at you this morning.”

“O, doing nicely as can be; the little fellow sleeps

‘As if he were fed on dormouse pie,
With sauce of sirup of poppy.’

But tell me what kind of a morning *you’ve* had.”

“O, pretty nice — just like all the receptions.

Stupid things, I think, they are. I was glad when it was over."

"I'm afraid you don't feel very well," said Mrs. Morgan, anxiously, as Nelly answered in this dull, listless way. "I hope you haven't taken cold. I think the janitor ought to have the rooms properly warmed, at least. You shall have some of my warm gruel, if you will. I expect you rushed off with half a breakfast this morning."

But Nelly declined the gruel. Her mother's kindness made her feel uncomfortable, conscious as she was of planning to deceive her; and she wanted to escape from it by quitting the room. So she said, —

"No, thank you, mother. I won't rob you of your sick dainties. I guess I'll go down in the dining-room, and see what Anne can give me for lunch."

She got up to go, and Mrs. Morgan only stopped her to beg that she would keep near the fire until she had got thoroughly warmed through; and Nelly smiled, and said yes, and stopped to kiss the sleeping baby, who lay all rolled up in a puff-ball, as she went out; but when the door had closed behind her, the smile vanished from her face, and the tired and sullen look came back.

“That ain’t much of a Christmas face you’ve brought back from the school wid ye, Miss Nelly,” said the good-natured Anne, as she came, bringing the tea-tray into the dining-room, where Nelly sat cowering gloomily over the fire. “An’ sure, an’ I should think ye’d look as bright as a button to-day, seein’ the great turkey yer father’s sent home for the dinner to-morrow, an’ the raisins and currants for the puddin’, an’ the oranges and nuts for dessert; for-by the bit o’ Santa Claus he’ll be sure to fetch home in his pockets to night for all of yez. In-dade, an’ I think it’s a fine Christmas Eve, an’ blissed be the name o’ Jesus, that gives us a happy time once a year!”

Nelly did not look up, or make any answer to this cheerful speech of the simple-hearted Irish girl; and Anne came close up to her, and saw how pale she looked.

“Is it sick, thin, ye are?” she asked, with ready sympathy. “O, but that’s too bad intirely on Christmas Eve. It’s chilled through I think ye’ve got—ye look all of a shiver. Here now, here’s a cup o’ nice hot tay, strong enough for grown folks, and some nice apple fritters: you like apple fritters. Eat and drink a bit, Miss

Nelly, an you'll feel better," said the kind-hearted girl, drawing up a chair between the fire and the table, and almost forcing Nelly to sit down in it.

"And there's the other childer poundin' at the door; I must go an' let 'em in; but you take your lunch comfortable all by yourself, Miss Nelly, while I take off their cloaks and mit-tens."

She went out, and shut the door behind her; but even her kind good-nature could not make Nelly feel "comfortable."

She felt both cold and hot; quick chills ran through her frame, succeeded by as quick flashes of heat; her head ached; her limbs were stiff; and she found, when she attempted to eat, that her throat was so sore that it was painful to swallow. It was evident that she had taken a severe cold from wetting her feet, and then sitting for hours in a fireless room; and poor Nelly had the added pains of illness to all the miseries of that most wretched day. She could not enjoy even her favorite apple fritters, but drank, with an effort, part of a cup of tea, and then went and lay down on the dining-room lounge, too tired and uncomfortable to sit up, and yet

not wishing to go up stairs, where she would be likely again to meet her mother's watchful and anxious glance.

The children came rushing in, in a few minutes, their cheeks rosy, and their eyes bright with their race home in the snow, and instantly besieged Nelly with eager histories of their day at the kindergarten, and as eager inquiries about her morning at school.

"O, Nelly, it was such fun!" said little Frank, his round face all in a glow with excitement; "we had such a cunning little Christmas tree, with such a jolly old Santa Claus on top of it, all powdered with snow, and wagging his head, and laughing to us—"

"Yes, and we each had an orange and some candy," interrupted Jennie, and Frank broke in again; "and every fellow had a present, and every girl, too; see, here's mine!" putting a tin trumpet close to Nelly's ear, and blowing a terrific blast. But Nelly did not laugh.

"Get away, you naughty boy! How dare you do such a thing?" she cried, raising herself on the couch, and giving her little brother a hearty push. "Don't come near me again, either of you; I'm sick, and I want to be let alone."

Make haste, and eat your lunch, and go up stairs. I don't want you down here. I'm sick, I tell you."

"Well, you needn't be so awful cross about it if you are," answered Frank, angrily; "and mind how you push a fellow about next time, please."

"Stop saying 'fellow' so much; you know mother doesn't like it!" said Nelly, sharply; "and eat your lunch, I say, and go. I'm tired of your noise."

"How cross you are to-day, Nelly, and you were so nice yesterday!" said Jennie, in a complaining tone; but before her sister could answer, Anne appeared to bring in more fritters.

"Come now, be good childer," she said, "and don't tease yer sister; she don't feel well to-day, and you must lave her alone. Sure, Miss Nelly, an' ye'll get yer death o' cold lyin' there with nothin' over ye; just let me fetch my shawl; it's hangin' in the hall since I came in from the grocery." And the good-natured girl went for it immediately, and spread the warm plaid all over the poor little, unhappy figure that lay shivering, even in this fire-lit room, on the lounge.

The children, who were good-hearted little

things, accepting Anne's word that there really was something amiss with their sister, quieted down into a low, confidential chat over their fritters; and when the last of the smoking pile had disappeared, they jumped down, and ran up stairs, to coax nurse to let them into their mother's room, that they might pour the story of the day's delights into her more sympathetic ear.

Meanwhile Anne cleared the table, tidied the room, stirred the fire, and, bidding Miss Nelly to "lay still, and take a bit of a nap," went off into the kitchen, and left her to her repose.

But Nelly did not find it such an easy thing to go to sleep. Her body was too full of aches, and her heart too full of bitter and anxious thoughts, for that. The events of the day, from her first eager springing up to this her dreary lying down again, would keep passing in and out of her mind, scene after scene shifting to and fro, like a kaleidoscope, in spite of her efforts to put away the memory of it all; and her head ached, and the soreness in her throat amounted to positive pain. Worst of all was the ever-returning thought, which would not be driven away, that her misfortunes were all caused by her own wrong-doing; and a verse she had learned at

Sunday school — “ *The way of the transgressor is hard* ” — kept sounding in her ears all the time.

It grew fainter, however, at last; and the changing images of the day settled into one indistinct mass, and kind sleep came at length to the weary and heavy-hearted girl, and she “ forgot her sorrow, and remembered her misery no more.”

Her mother sent Jennie down to inquire why she did not come up stairs, and Anne sent back word that she was sleeping so nicely it was a pity to disturb her; and so the hours of the Christmas Eve wore away quietly enough in that house, while out of doors the streets were alive with the rushing of sleighs, the jingling of bells, the shouts of merry children, and the hurrying to and fro of eager shoppers; in many a happy home Christmas trees were being planted and hung with their own peculiar fruit in locked rooms by loving mammas and aunties; kind-hearted people were packing baskets of provisions and warm clothing to be sent to the houses of the poor and the needy; and the whole Christian world seemed to have paused an instant in the eager race of toil and of pleasure, to

draw breath, and be glad, and thank God, if only by a cheerful face and a kindly mood, for the gift of His Son, our Savior Jesus Christ.

It was after four o'clock, and Nelly was still sleeping, when a little girl knocked at the basement door, and asked to see her.

"I have brought her rubber boots, which she forgot, and left at school to-day," she said; and Anne exclaimed aloud, —

"There, then, that's what's the matter with her, then! Sure, an' it's no wonder she's choked up with cold, if she come home without overshoes in all this slush! She'll be much obliged to ye, miss, I'm sure, an' —" But just there she was interrupted.

Even in her sleep Nelly was not unconscious of her deception, and the danger of its being found out; and the sound of voices, in connection with her name, and school, and overshoes, startled her like a thunder-clap. She sprang up from the lounge, her cheeks pale and her hair disordered, and rushed out into the hall, eager to prevent Maggie from making any disclosures.

"Why in the world didn't you ask the young lady in out of the cold?" she asked, sharply, of Anne, who stared at her in amazement. "A

pretty way to treat my company, to be sure! Come into the dining-room, Maggie; I'm very much obliged to you, indeed, for bringing home my boots."

And she took Maggie's hand, and drew her in almost by force, while the little girl looked at her in surprise at her excited manner; and Anne muttered, as she went back to the kitchen,—

"Sure, an' she's the disagree'blest spoken child iver I see, whin she's a mind to be! Ketch me coverin' her up wi' my best shawl again in a hurry!"

The warmth of Nelly's hospitality cooled down, however, as soon as she had got Maggie safely out of Anne's hearing. She decided at once to treat her so coldly that she would not be likely to visit her again; and so, pushing a chair carelessly towards her little guest, she threw herself back upon the lounge, and groaned out, in a vexed tone,—

"O, dear, dear! how my head aches! I was asleep, and the noise at the door woke me with such a start!"

"Why, I'm sure there wasn't such a great deal of noise," said Maggie, merrily; "I guess you couldn't have been very sound asleep, Nelly."

And, anyhow, what are you doing asleep on Christmas Eve? The very idea of such a thing!"

"Don't speak to me of Christmas! I hate the very sound of the word!" exclaimed Nelly, so bitterly that Maggie started back shocked and frightened.

"O, don't say that, Nelly," she said, coaxingly; "you mustn't mind what happened this morning so much. Of course you had a right to wear whatever you and your mother chose, and it was very rude in us girls to tease and laugh at you. I've felt sorry about it all day, Nelly, and I was real glad to find your boots, so that I might have a chance to come round and tell you so."

"Much good it does to be sorry, after my whole day is spoiled," said Nelly, sullenly. "I wonder how you'd have liked it to be made fun of in that way. I guess you'd have been mad enough to go off and forget your rubbers, too. And now I've taken cold, getting my feet soaking wet, and I suppose I shall be laid up all the holidays. And you talk to me about *merry* Christmas!"

"It is too bad. I'm just as sorry as I can be," said Maggie, in a real distress of sympathy. "But

maybe you'll get over it in a day or two, if you take some medicine right away. And your shoes, Nelly,—your beautiful bronze shoes,—did they get all spoiled with the mud?"

Nelly started, and the blood rushed to her face. She was afraid to let any one know what had happened to the shoes, and she wished heartily that Maggie Lang, with her troublesome questions, would go away, and never come to see her again.

"No," she said presently, speaking very impatiently; "they're not spoiled at all; only the soles got wet—they're so thin. O, dear, how my head aches!"

"I'm so glad to hear it—I mean that the shoes were not hurt—not that your head aches, Nelly," said the unsuspecting Maggie; "though, indeed, I don't see how you could help wetting the sides, too; you must have *flown* home, Nelly. But what did your mother say when you came back so early: did you tell her the girls laughed at you, Nelly?"

"Of course I did!" said Nelly, sharply; "and she was angry enough, I can tell you. I don't think she'll ever want to lay eyes on any of them again."

Maggie crimsoned with shame and wounded feeling. "You needn't be afraid," she said, proudly; "I shall not trouble your mother with my presence, nor you, either, since you feel so bitter about it. I've told you, over and over again, how very sorry I was for what little share I had in making you miss such a pleasant day, the grand surprise, and all; and I must say that, considering it was mostly your own fault, you're very unkind about it. I'm not sorry I brought you your boots, but I shall not trouble you with any more visits, Nelly."

Maggie rose with much dignity, and was about to take her departure; but Nelly's curiosity was roused, and, though she was really glad she would not be likely to come again with questions and remarks that might betray all her own deception, still she did not want her to go until she had told her all about the day at school. So she endeavored to assume a cordial tone, and said, —

"O, no, Maggie, don't go yet! I'm sure it was very good of you to bring my boots, and I'm much obliged. My head aches so it makes me feel cross; but you mustn't mind it. What do you mean by the 'grand surprise'? What happened at school after I went away?"

“O, sure enough, you haven’t heard about what a fine time we had! What a pity you missed it, Nelly!” And the good-natured Maggie sat down again, and began to tell of the grand dinner, and the famous sport in the great play-room. But Nelly did not listen with pleasure; her face grew darker than ever with jealousy and anger, and she broke out, at last, —

“It is too, too mean! There never was anything meaner than that *I* should have been the only one to be kept out of all the fun, and made sick into the bargain.”

“It is too bad, Nelly,” began Maggie, in a pitying tone; but Nelly interrupted her sharply. “There, I don’t want to hear any more about it,” she said, savagely. “I wish I need never go to the old school again, or see anybody that ever belonged there. I hate it all.”

Maggie rose again, this time really indignant. “Good by, Nelly,” she said. “I hope you will not be very sick, but I shall not take the liberty to come and inquire.”

“Nobody cares if you don’t,” muttered Nelly, turning over on the lounge, and covering her face with the shawl. And Maggie walked off, her little round face all in a flush of wounded feeling.

Her indignation had begun to melt into compassion for poor Nelly's unhappiness, however, before she reached her home ; and when she met her father on the stoop, his pockets all bulged out with mysterious-looking parcels, she forgot everything but that it was Christmas Eve, and that she, at least, was very happy.

CHAPTER VII.

MEANWHILE, while Maggie was merrily guessing at the contents of the mysterious-looking parcels, and her father was as merrily declaring all her guesses to be wrong, Nelly lay still on the lounge in the now darkening room, thinking over and over all the troubles of the day, and feeling more bitter than ever, now that she knew how much enjoyment she had missed. Presently Anne came in to light the gas and lay the cloth for supper; and Nelly rose slowly, and made her way, painfully, with stiff and aching limbs, up stairs.

Her father, too, had just come in, and was taking off his overcoat in the hall. His pockets bulged out suspiciously also; but Nelly felt too ill to care what they contained, and was only anxious to escape his questions as to why she looked so dull, and if that was the kind of face for Christmas Eve.

She had to run another gantlet of questions

when she went into her mother's room; and she was thankful when supper was at last over, and she could creep off to bed. Not that the night brought her much relief; her temples throbbed with pain; her limbs ached, and the choking sensation in her throat grew worse and worse, so that by morning she was scarcely able to speak, and felt quite too ill to rise. Her father was alarmed when he came in to see her, and went immediately for the doctor, who came and pronounced the disease to be a decided case of diphtheria, which would necessitate confinement to her room for at least a fortnight.

“A pretty idea this, for you to be getting sick on Christmas Day!” said the good doctor, with a kindly smile. “I guess you must have run and romped too much at the school, yesterday. My little daughter was telling me you youngsters had a grand Panjandrum there—eh, Miss Nelly?”

Nelly grew, if possible, paler than she was already. She had quite forgotten that Dr. Lawson's little daughter Annie went to No. 8; and now surely all the shameful story about her would come out. For a moment her heart seemed to stop beating with terror, and she turned her eyes imploringly, first on the doctor,

and then on her father. But with the next instant came the remembrance that little Annie Lawson belonged to the *Primary* Department, and wouldn't be likely to know the cause of her leaving school, even if she had happened to notice that she was absent. The blood came back again to her heart and her cheek, and she answered, hoarsely, —

“O, no; that isn't the reason, doctor, for I didn't stay to play at all. I didn't feel very well, and I came home quite early.”

“O, that's it,” said the doctor, cheerily. “Well, well, you've taken a pretty bad cold somehow or other, my child; but we'll pull you safely through it, God willing. And even if you can't be up and about, enjoying what Santa Claus brought you, and can't even have your share of the turkey and mince pies, which is pretty hard, I confess, why, still you've a good deal to make it a ‘Merry Christmas’ for you. Here's your good papa, now, ready to do anything in the world for you; you've got a snug room, and a warm fire, while many poor children, as sick as you, are shivering with the cold; and the blessed sun is shining as bright as if it

was bran new ; and the church bells are ringing, and all the world is happy, keeping Christ's birthday ; and you must try to be as patient as you can — won't you, my little maid ? and I'll be in again this evening, to see how you're getting along."

He was off, with a kind good by, and Anne, who had just come in with some arrowroot for Nelly, said, "What a nice gentleman, for sure, Dr. Lawson was !" But Nelly thought sullenly that it was very easy for those who were well and happy to preach to others that they ought to be so too, and swallowed her breakfast in no very cheerful mood. Meanwhile her father, who had accompanied the doctor down stairs, came back, bringing his hands full of pretty Christmas gifts, which he spread out on the bed around her.

There was a handkerchief-box, of beautifully ornamented card-board, from her mother, who knew that Nelly's handkerchiefs were very apt to lie scattered over her drawer, in anything but an orderly way ; and a little scent-bag, smelling as sweet as a bed of violets in spring time, was put in as little Jennie's present to her sister ; a whole set of the "Meadowgrass Stories," six

dainty volumes in green and scarlet, crimson and brown, purple and buff, from her father ; a coral bracelet, to match her necklace, from the aunt who had given her that and a little strawberry emery cushion as Frank's present.

Santa Claus had certainly not forgotten Nelly ; and yet his gifts did not afford much pleasure to the unhappy girl. Her face lit up for a moment at the sight of the bracelet, which appealed to her strongest passion, — love of dress, — and she clasped it languidly round her wrist for a moment ; but she was suffering too much to be able to enjoy even an ornament, which, at another time, would have filled her heart with rapture, and she asked presently to have all the things taken away.

Then she asked that the blinds might be shut, and the shades drawn down ; she did not want to see the sunshine, nor to hear the merry sound of the bells ; and then she turned her face to the wall, and drew the covers close up to her chin, as though she wanted to be alone ; and her father went out, hoping that she would be able to go to sleep. Then, after stopping to see how the mother and baby were getting on, and to report that Nelly was a little more comfortable, he took

Frank and Jennie, who were beginning to feel that it was rather dull in the house with so many sick people, round to the church to share in the Christmas-tree festival there.

Nurse came in and out to give Nelly her medicine, and to bring her loving messages from her mother, who felt it rather hard that she and her daughter should have to be separated in their illness, but begged Nelly to bear it bravely, as she was trying to do. Anne took special pains to flavor her food as nicely as possible; "it was too bad, anyway, the pore little craythur should be havin' to ate sick messes on Christmas Day, whin there was the turkey brownin' so beautiful, and the puddin' jist as full o' plums as it could stick!" said the good-natured handmaiden. Everybody, indeed, was as kind as could be; but still the day passed very heavily by to the sick girl.

The pain of her illness would have been hard enough to bear of itself, but when to this was added a heart full of such unhappy thoughts, it was hard indeed. And the doctor's words had brought yet another anxiety. Diphtheria! that was a dangerous disease. Nelly had had a little cousin die of it a year or two ago; and only last

winter two of her schoolmates had been brought to the grave, after only a single night's illness, with this terrible disease. What if this should be her fate — *if she should die?* Was she *ready* to die?

Ah, no — never! and least of all, just now, with this burden of sin and deception on her soul. Nelly was obliged to acknowledge this in her own secret heart. Now, in the possible near approach of death, she could no longer pretend to excuse herself for what she had done, and she felt keenly enough how false, and mean, and wicked she must appear in the sight of God. She knew, too, that she had no right to hope for his forgiveness until she was willing to confess her fault to her mother, and acknowledge all the falsehoods, spoken and acted, of which she had been guilty; all the evil tempers, the anger, and jealousy, which had filled her heart with bitterness since yesterday morning.

But this she was not willing to do unless she was obliged to. It would cost her infinite shame and mortification, and, perhaps, after all, it might not be necessary. She did not believe she was going to die this time, and, after she got well, she would go hard to work, and replace the spoiled

shoes ; and then no one need ever know what she had done. And, meanwhile, she felt quite sorry enough without having to lose the confidence of her father and mother, and she was resolved never to do such a thing again. She supposed it *was* wrong, as every one kept telling her, to be so fond of dress ; and after this she would try never again to care about anything except to be neat and nice. Indeed, she would be quite a different girl every way, and even try to become a Christian ; and what more could be expected of her ?

So the poor foolish girl deluded herself, and deceived her own heart with false promises of great things to be done in the future, while she refused to do the duty near at hand—to tell her mother all the story of yesterday. And, though her mind was far from being at rest, and her conscience troubled her continually, still, as the disease grew no worse, and the dread of possible death became fainter and fainter, she closed her ears to its warnings, and persisted in her sinful silence.

Thus the Christmas week passed by, merrily enough to the world outside, amid the sunshine, the bustle, and the gay jingling of sleigh-bells,

but drearily enough to Nelly, in her darkened chamber, with her cheerless thoughts. New Year's Day, too, came, with its added gayety; everywhere the sidewalks were crowded with gentlemen, hastening from house to house to renew the last year's friendships, and bid to all a Happy New Year; everywhere the streets thronged with flying sleighs, and every door opening and reopening at the sound of the calling bell.

Still Nelly was confined to her own room, and could not even see her mother or the baby; for, though the first day of her illness had been the worst, and she was daily getting better, the doctor thought it best that she should run no risk of taking fresh cold, and that no one else should be exposed to the possibility of sharing her disease. So another long, dull week dragged slowly by, and at length the freedom of the house was granted to her; and, with a sigh of inexpressible relief, she found herself no more a prisoner in her dark, close room, and felt at last entirely safe from her haunting fear of death.

Did she remember now all the promises which she had made, in the hour of her dread, to God and her own soul?

We shall see.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE anxiety about the shoes was, of course, never absent from Nelly's mind ; and now that her strength was coming back, and she felt able to work, she persuaded Anne to go out and invest for her the dollar which had come as New-Year pocket money from her father in sundry packages of gay-colored worsteds ; and for a while she almost forgot the disagreeable object of the work in her pleasure in sorting and winding the bright shades of scarlet wool.

Nelly had always preferred what she called "fancy work" to plain sewing ; and she could crochet and knit with considerable skill and taste. She had decided on making a breakfast cape ; she saw a great many of them always hanging in the windows of shops where worsted work was sold, and knew that they were an article of very general wear with ladies on cold winter mornings. She thought she could easily sell it for at least four dollars, — the retail price in the shops

was five,—and if she failed in that, she would persuade the girls in her class to club together, and buy it for Miss Kavanagh, whose birthday, she knew, was near at hand.

To her mother she said—forgetting all her solemn vows never again to be guilty of deception—that she intended to present it to her teacher, herself; and Mrs. Morgan, always pleased at any manifestation of interest in school on Nelly's part, and glad that she should have some pleasant occupation to beguile the tedium of her confinement, approved entirely of the plan, and watched the progress of the work with a very kindly interest.

The little shawl grew apace under Nelly's busy fingers, and was at last finally completed, fringe, tassels, and all, and very handsome and comfortable looking in its warm shades of red, the very evening before the day on which it was decided that Nelly was well enough to return to school.

She wrapped it up carefully, and took it to school with her, to present to Miss Kavanagh, as she told her mother, to try and get the longed-for money which should replace her shoes, and save her from detection, as she told herself. She had to pass, on her way to school, several small

shops where needles and thread, trimmings, worsted work, and such things were sold; and she thought she had better go in at once, and see if she could dispose of her precious parcel.

Nelly was not generally a timid child, and she had not supposed she should mind doing this at all; but when she had opened the shop door, and the loud tinkle of its bell had summoned the woman who kept it to the counter, she began to feel that going into a store to offer to *sell* things was very different from entering with money in the purse for the purpose of buying.

Nelly felt her cheeks burn, and her tongue refused to utter the words she wished; she fidgeted about, and remained silent, until the woman, who had not yet had a chance to finish her breakfast, and whose baby was screaming aloud in the little back shop, demanded impatiently what she wanted.

“Breakfast shawls,” stammered Nelly, scarcely knowing what she was saying; and the woman, looking as though she didn’t have much faith in the prospect of selling one to such a child, turned to the shelves, and tossed down two or three rather coarse-looking shawls upon the counter.

“How much are these?” asked Nelly.

“Four dollars and a half,” said the woman.

Nelly thought how much handsomer was hers in its soft, warm shades of scarlet, and said, hesitatingly, —

“I didn’t want to buy one ; I have one here to sell, which is a great deal nicer than these, and which you may have for four dollars. You can easily sell it for five. Will you look at it, ma’am?”

But the woman’s face darkened in an instant.

“I might ha’ known you weren’t a going to buy anything!” she said, angrily ; “what do you come here botherin’ me for nothin’? No, I won’t look at your shawl ; I can’t sell half I’ve got on hand now !”

She was going off at once, but Nelly interrupted, pleadingly, —

“But mine is a great deal handsomer than these ; just look at it—won’t you? I’m sure you can sell it—”

“If it’s as handsome as you’re sassy, it must be a beauty!” replied the woman, coarsely ; “will you go off now about your business?”

And Nelly went at once, full of anger and shame, and beginning to feel not a little anxious

lest she should not be able to dispose of her work at all ; and then what would become of her ?

Very timidly, and looking round stealthily, lest any of her schoolmates should happen to be coming that way, she entered the next shop whose window displayed worsted work.

A nice-looking old lady sat behind the counter here, and she got up, pushed back her glasses, and looked pleasantly at Nelly, while waiting to hear what she wished. Nelly felt encouraged by her kind face, and stated her business with less hesitation than in the other shop ; but, while the old lady showed no displeasure at all, she looked very doubtful, and Nelly felt her heart sink again.

“ Let me see your work, my dear,” she said ; and Nelly opened her parcel eagerly, and displayed the pretty shawl, all glowing with bright color, and the old lady took it up and examined it kindly.

“ How much did you expect to get for it ? ” she asked.

“ I thought it was worth four dollars,” said Nelly, timidly, and the shopkeeper shook her head and smiled.

“ It is very pretty,” she said, “ very nicely

shaded, and very evenly knit; but there isn't more than twelve shillings' worth of worsted in it wholesale, and a good knitter could make it in a day. I'm afraid you wouldn't get more than two dollars and a half for it at any of the shops, if you sell it at all."

"And you sell shawls no larger, nor prettier, for just double the money!" exclaimed Nelly, indignantly.

"Yes, but you must remember we have to pay the rent of our stores, our taxes, to be paid for our time and labor waiting our customers, and to *live* on our profits; and we find it hard enough work doing it in these times, even when we charge double what we pay. I'm afraid you will not get more than twenty shillings for it, my dear."

"Well, will you give me that for it?" asked Nelly, getting quite desperate. "I *must* have some money some way!"

"Why, you don't look as if you were in need of anything," said the old lady, glancing at Nelly's comfortable dress and general air of being well taken care of; and then, looking a little curiously at the girl's face, which, all of a sudden, flamed as scarlet as the shawl.

“That’s none of my business, however,” she went on, pitying her confusion; “and I’m sorry, my dear, that I’ve got such a large stock of breakfast shawls on hand that I don’t like to buy any more, particularly as the season is nearly over. I’ll tell you what I’ll do, though,” continued the good-natured shopkeeper, seeing how disappointed her little customer looked. “Since you want the money so badly, and have taken the trouble to make the shawl so nicely, it is a pity it should be left on your hands; you may leave it here, if you like, and I’ll show it with my own, and sell it for you if I can.”

Nelly considered a moment, and then answered, hesitatingly, “You’re very kind, ma’am, and I’m very much obliged to you, indeed; but I want the money just as soon as I can get it, and I think, maybe I can sell it somewhere else. Anyhow, I think I’ll try.”

“Very well, my dear,” said the old lady, just as kindly as before; “try, and I hope you’ll succeed; but if you don’t, you may still bring it here, if you like, and I will do the best I can for you.”

“Thank you, ma’am; you’re very, *very* kind,” said Nelly, quite touched to gratitude; “and

now, good morning ;” and the old lady nodded and smiled, and Nelly went out of the shop, and started off again on her errand, not very hopeful of success.

She had no time, either, to make any further effort now, for she was already in sight of the school-house, and knew, by the way the girls were hurrying in at the great gate, that it must be nearly nine o’clock. As she did not wish to be late on the first day of her reappearance at school, she, too, quickened her steps, and soon merged into the throng of children that swarmed on the sidewalks, in the lobby, and on the stairs of the great building.

She met several of her own class-mates in the wardrobe, but they did not give her a very cordial greeting ; and Nelly read in their altered looks that they had not forgotten the disappointment she had caused them on reception day. Neither had she forgotten or forgiven all that their thoughtless ridicule had made her suffer, and for a moment her black eyes flashed with something of the old angry light, and she was about to return their cool glances with looks of haughty scorn ; but she remembered that she had a favor to ask of them that day, and that it would not do to display

her real feelings, no matter how much she might be tempted.

Nelly had practised to deceive so much of late, that it was becoming quite easy to her ; and so she readily controlled her anger, greeted the girls with a pleasant smile, and a friendly word, and went on into her class-room, looking as natural and cheerful as though nothing unpleasant had occurred since she had last been there.

School was not yet opened, and the girls not obliged to be in strict order. A low murmur of "There's Nelly Morgan come back !" ran round the class ; and Nelly's quick ear detected that there was no glad welcome in the tone. Still she would not appear conscious of anything disagreeable, but went quietly up to Miss Kavanagh, bade her a respectful good morning, and inquired if she was to resume her old seat at the desk with Maggie Lang.

Her teacher hesitated a moment, and then said, "I suppose so, Nelly ; though I think you scarcely deserve a seat so near the front — do you, after leaving your post and your duty, as you did on reception day ? I know it was very wrong in the girls to laugh at you, but it was very silly in you to mind them, especially as you might have

known your dress would excite remark; and it was very wrong and very daring in you to go away without asking permission, or even informing me of your purpose, when you knew you were so much needed. You gave us all a very unpleasant disappointment; still you probably were quite as much disappointed yourself when you heard what a delightful day the whole school had. At any rate, you have been punished quite enough by your long illness, and we must all forgive you now, and welcome you back among us. Only, Nelly, my dear child, you must let it be a lesson to you, to teach you that fine clothes have nothing to do with real happiness; we find that only in the way of our duty. You may take your old seat, and Maggie will show you the lessons for the day."

Miss Kavanagh had spoken in a low, kind tone; but Nelly's proud spirit rebelled at even so gentle a rebuke. "*Give* her my shawl! Not if I know it!" she thought, scornfully, remembering what she had told her mother; but she was careful not to show any irritation, and, with a quiet bow, left her teacher's desk, and walked to her former seat. Maggie Lang made room for her politely, though she had not forgotten Nelly's

rudeness at their last meeting, and, to tell the truth, would have preferred any other desk-mate.

But she was a good-hearted little thing, and when she saw how gentle and quiet Nelly was, how pleasantly she said good morning, and how well she behaved all through the opening exercises of school, instead of trying to make her laugh in prayer-time, as she had often done before, why, Maggie's little bit of hurt feeling quite melted away; she reminded herself that Nelly was sick when she had spoken to her so unkindly, and decided that it was quite too bad that the poor girl should be treated coldly by her class, after having spent her holidays so dolefully; and so, at recess, when the girls were allowed to go about the room, and talk with each other, Maggie took it upon herself to plead the cause of the offender.

"You know, girls," she said, going over to a corner, where a group of the most influential members of the class were gathered, discussing that same individual — "you know the poor thing lost all the fun on reception day, and all the nice times at Christmas, and was sick in bed through the whole holidays. I think she's had it hard enough, myself, and that it would be rather mean

in us to treat her badly now. We must think how we'd like it, ourselves, you know. Come over, Annie, you and Alice, and speak to her now, with me."

The girls hesitated a moment, and questioned a little among themselves; but Maggie's sweet kindness had made its impression upon them, and they presently consented to obey the Golden Rule, of which she had reminded them, and "do as they would be done by." They crossed the room with her, and went over to the desk where Nelly sat alone, hiding her anger and mortification at being thus left to herself, under the pretence of studying busily, and spoke to her pleasantly, though a little uncertain how she would receive them.

In her heart, Nelly had no welcome for them, for she knew that they had come only through Maggie's persuasions. She was not generous enough even to feel grateful to her for forgiving her so sweetly, and using her influence in her behalf; but the thought of the shawl and the shoes made her careful to conceal her feelings; and she lifted her head from her book, and answered the girls with a bright smile, so like that of the old Nelly who used to be the leader

of the class in all sorts of fun and frolic, that they forgot, on the moment, their cause of complaint against her, and were quite ready to restore her to her old place in their favor.

Nelly was not slow to take advantage of the good impression she saw she had made, and said, lightly, —

“ I know you were all angry with me on reception day, girls, and I know I gave you cause ; but, then, you must remember *I* had cause to be angry, too, and I think I had the worst of it, in the long run ; so now let's not think any more about it. 'Tisn't likely it'll ever happen again. Tell me all about the holidays. What did you have for Christmas, and what were you doing while poor I was lying sick in bed, and couldn't even eat a Christmas dinner.”

“ It was too bad,” exclaimed the girls, now quite full of sympathy for Nelly's misfortunes ; and then they began, all talking together, to give the history of their various experiences during vacation ; but just then, peal, peal ! went the principal's silver bell, and their conversation was cut short at once. Each girl sought her own seat immediately ; the monitors took their places at the doors ; the teacher at the piano struck up

a lively march ; the crowd of scholars, who had gone down for a run in the play-ground during recess, filed into their class-rooms ; the great glass doors glided together to the sound of soft, slow music, and the machinery of school was once more put in motion.

But at noon came a longer intermission, when Miss Kavanagh was in the habit of allowing those of her class who did not go home to dinner to go into a small side room which adjoined hers, and eat their luncheon, and talk freely among themselves, under the charge of a monitor only, selected from their own number. As soon as they had assembled there, to-day, Annie, and Alice, and Maggie gathered round Nelly again, eager to tell to some *new* person all the pleasant story of their Christmas. The rest of the class, following the example of their leaders, crowded round, too ; and Nelly found herself, by one of those sudden revulsions of popular feeling common to the school-room as well as to the state, surrounded by a circle of friends and admirers, all eager to talk and to listen, to hear and to be heard. The conversation ran mostly on Christmas and Christmas gifts ; and Nelly thought that this was a capital opportunity to introduce the subject of the shawl.

“Do you know, girls,” said she, cunningly, “*one* of the things that made me so cross at school, Christmas Eve, was because I saw our present to Miss Kavanagh was just about the meanest one in any class. As I passed through Miss Somers’s and Miss Browning’s classes, I saw such pretty things lying on their desks! beautiful glove-boxes, and trinket-stands, and ever so many nice things; and Miss Kavanagh just had some kind of a stupid book. Now, I know her birthday comes the last of this month, and *I* think we ought to club together and buy her something handsome. I’ll give half a dollar towards it myself. What do you say, girls?”

The girls looked at one another doubtingly. They had thought their Christmas token of affection to their teacher—a handsome illustrated edition of Tennyson’s Poems—a very nice present indeed; but, now that Nelly spoke of it so slightly, they began to be afraid that perhaps it was rather shabby. They had public spirit enough not to wish their teacher to be less honored than another; and, moreover, they loved her well enough to wish to give her pleasure. But the holidays were just over; the time of gifts seemed past for the present, and their store

of pocket-money had been exhausted by Christmas demands. They did not like to ask their parents for more just now; and so the glance which the girls exchanged at Nelly's unexpected proposition was a very doubtful one.

But Nelly did not give them a chance to refuse at once.

"We won't decide about it now," she said, lightly; "think it over, and we'll talk about it again to-morrow. Only I feel *mean* about that trashy book, and I know that some of the other classes think us dreadfully stingy. Besides, I know of something which it would be a real charity in us to buy—a beautiful scarlet breakfast-shawl, which a poor little girl brought into a shop where I stopped on my way to school this morning, and offered to sell for five dollars. It's just what Miss Kavanagh needs, on chilly days, here in school, and ten cents apiece from us fifty girls would buy it. Just think—*ten cents!* Who would grudge that much to please a good teacher like ours?"

And Nelly looked round the class with an air of scornful triumph, as though quite sure no one *there* could be so mean; but, unfortunately, just then the principal's bell pealed forth again, and once more the consultation was broken up.

CHAPTER IX.

THERE was no opportunity, after school was dismissed in the afternoon, for Nelly to say anything more to the class in general on the subject of the proposed present to Miss Kavanagh, for no pupils were allowed to remain in the school-house after three o'clock, except those who were detained by the teachers. She spoke of it again, however, to Annie and Alice, whose way home lay partly the same as hers; and they agreed with her so entirely, that she felt quite confident of accomplishing her purpose, and went home with a lighter heart than she had had since that unhappy Christmas Eve.

Her mother noticed the change with pleasure, when Nelly ran up into her room, and she said, kindly, —

“I think it has brightened you up, my dear, to get back to school, and see the girls again. Were they glad to see you? and how did Miss Kavanagh like her shawl?”

“She couldn’t help liking it, of course,” answered Nelly, shortly, and turning away so that her mother could not see how the blood sprang to her face, as she added this implied falsehood to the long list of her deceptions; and Mrs. Morgan, knowing how irritable Nelly had been since her illness, forbore to notice her ungracious manner, or to press her with questions as to its cause.

Meanwhile, although Nelly felt a little uneasy at the thought of this new deceit, she comforted herself with the sure hope that the morrow would put an end to the possibility of any of her falsehoods being discovered. Miss Kavanagh would have the shawl, and her mother would never know but that it was Nelly’s own free gift; she would have the money to replace the shoes, would buy them on her way home that very afternoon, and put them away in the drawer, just where the others had been kept; and there, at last, would be the happy end of all her troubles and all her anxieties.

Nelly felt quite light-hearted and cheerful as she thought over all this, and considered herself really quite a smart and clever girl to manage to get out of her difficulties so easily. She

surprised and delighted her father by letting him hear her singing gayly, as he came into the dining-room to tea ; and he pulled her ear playfully, and kissed her, and said he was glad to get back his daughter again ; that he thought it had been another little girl staying in the house since Christmas, whom he did not like half so well as his Nelly.

Nelly tried to laugh at this, but that fatherly kiss, so full of trust and affection, filled her heart with shame at the thought of how she was even then practising to deceive ; but she had to conceal this feeling, and keep up her merry manner, and soon she forgot again all about her wrong doing, and was really as care free as she seemed.

She went to bed that night without a single prayer for forgiveness, — with scarcely a thought of needing it, — and started off to school the next morning with a light step and a hopeful heart. Several girls were gathered in one corner of the class-room as she entered, discussing something of pleasant interest, evidently, by the eager look on their faces ; and Nelly joined them, hoping that the purchase of the shawl was the matter under consideration.

But she was mistaken; the topic of interest seemed to be the discussion of a party, which had been promised by her mother to Fanny Archer, one of the oldest girls in the class. Fanny herself was the centre of the group, and, with a very important look on her pretty face, was giving particulars of the coming event in a confidential tone to the circle of admiring friends.

“I don’t want you to talk much about it,” she was saying, as Nelly came up, “for I don’t want to hurt any one’s feelings, and yet, of course, I can’t invite all the class. My mother wouldn’t wish me to be intimate with some of these girls; and besides, there would be too many of them, with all my other friends.” Then, seeing Nelly approaching, she said, quickly, “Hu-ush! I haven’t decided about her yet;” and immediately there was a significant silence, and Nelly found herself received with rather cool looks by the whole company of fickle-hearted adherents.

How she burned inly with indignation! But it would be bad policy to betray her feelings; so she smiled brightly, gave a pleasant good morning to the girls, and then took her seat at her own desk, and soon appeared to be absorbed in study.

But she was not even looking at her book ; her eyes were full of passionate tears, and she was thinking, angrily, how did any one in that class *dare* to leave *her* out in any plan for pleasure, when she had so long been acknowledged as its leader in all such matters ; when she lived in a nicer house, and wore richer clothes, and moved in better society than almost any of them ! These were the standards by which Nelly judged, and she supposed every one else did the same ; and, judging by those, how did Fanny Archer dare to hesitate about inviting her to her house ?

Could she possibly *know* anything ? Nelly grew pale at the mere thought. But no ; of course she did not ; how could she ? And she *should* ask her to her party ; Nelly vowed that to herself ; she would manage it some way ; and when it was all over, she would manage also to punish the impertinent creature for the slight she had dared even to *think* of putting upon her !

Such were the thoughts which surged in Nelly's angry bosom, while she seemed so quietly absorbed in study ; and, meanwhile, the rooms had gradually filled up, and school was about to be

opened. She tried at recess to gather the girls round her as she had done yesterday, but succeeded only poorly. Popularity at school is as variable as everywhere else; and to-day Fanny Archer was the centre of attraction, and Fanny Archer's party the only subject of interest to the chosen ones, to whom she condescended to be confidential about it.

Nelly had not yet been asked to join her councils, but she knew that the surest way to make herself desirable was to appear quite indifferent; and so she compelled herself to seem unconscious that anything unusual was going on, though burning all the time with indignation at being left out, and being exceedingly vexed besides that this provoking party should come up just now to turn all the girls' heads, and make it more difficult than ever to interest them about a present for Miss Kavanagh. If she could not manage to speak to them at noon, she was afraid the chance of obtaining relief from her trouble through them would be forever gone!

Meanwhile, Fanny Archer had debated the question whether or not she should invite Nelly to her party, with several advisers, among them Maggie Lang; and, as usual, her kind-hearted

influence had been thrown in the scale of the good-natured thing, and Fanny had decided that, although Nelly had certainly behaved in a very selfish and unlady-like way on reception day, still she had been severely punished, and should not have the further mortification of being left out in the cold by her.

So, as they were passing out of the classroom at their dinner hour, Fanny went up to Nelly, and informed her, in a confidential whisper, that she would be happy to have the pleasure of her company at her house on Wednesday, the twenty-fifth of January. Nelly's black eyes sparkled with triumph as she heard this, and she thought, exultingly, —

“Ah, she *dared* not leave me out, after all!” But she merely expressed her thanks, and said she should be happy to attend, then parting with Fanny, who lived sufficiently near the school to go home to her dinner, she hastened into the little side room, eager for the chance of speaking* to the girls while Fanny was absent.

But she found it almost impossible to get any one to listen to her. The chosen few, who were conscious of the honor of being on Fanny's list of guests, were too busy discussing, in whispered

tones, the all-important subject of what they should wear to the party, and the words "blue tarlatane," "white muslin," "pink silk," and so on, and so on, flew back and forth like shuttlecocks. The unfortunate many who had *not* been honored with an invitation, partly guessed and partly overheard what was going on, and withdrew themselves to hold an indignation meeting in one corner of the room, from whence they cast glances of pretended scorn and indifference at their more favored rivals.

Both parties were too much occupied with this exciting subject to feel inclined to interest themselves specially about their teacher; and when Nelly at length took advantage of a comparative lull in the busy buzz of whispering, to say, in her most insinuating tone, "Well, girls, what conclusion have you come to about the present for dear Miss Kavanagh?" it fell even flatter than yesterday.

There was an ominous silence for a moment, and then one of the girls said, carelessly, —

"O, we can't be bothered thinking about that now, Nelly. *We've* got something else on our minds, if *you* haven't."

Nelly would not appear to notice the sneer

implied in these words. She only thought, "I hadn't intended to go to the party; but I'll go now, if I die for it, just to *prove* to them all that that impudent Fanny Archer did not *dare* to leave me out."

"O, I guess you will find that I have the same thing on my mind which is weighing so heavily on yours," she said, with a smile; "but, then, it needn't hinder us from thinking about the other matter, too. There isn't much thinking necessary. It's only to decide what the present shall be, and bring ten cents apiece to pay for it."

"My father says he don't approve of the scholars being taxed so all the time," put in another girl, rather coarsely. "He says his school taxes are heavy enough already."

"Yes, and the trustees don't approve of it either," said yet another dissenting voice. "And I don't believe Miss Kavanagh would care about a present that had to be coaxed out of the girls. I know she wouldn't like it if she knew it."

"And I don't believe she wants a shawl to wear in the house, anyhow," said yet another doubter. "She always laughs, and calls us little old women, when she sees us bundled up in the school-room."

Nelly listened to all these objections with a contemptuous smile.

"Then you all really mean to refuse?" she asked, scornfully.

"O, well, we've just got through fussing over one present, and we don't feel like beginning it all again. Let's talk of something else," said one of the girls, in a decided tone, as though to put an end to the discussion; and Nelly, though burning with anger and disappointment, did not dare express her feelings too openly, for fear of exciting suspicion that she herself had some special interest in disposing of the shawl.

She could only shrug her shoulders, and curl her lip in a contemptuous way, and rise and leave the room. The girls understood this well enough, and various not very complimentary remarks were exchanged about her, as soon as the door had closed. But Nelly knew and cared nothing about these; the disappointment of her sure hope of obtaining the money that day was a great blow, and she went back to her desk too full of anxiety and wretchedness to think of anything else. She made up her mind to try the shops again; and this she did again and again on her way home, with no better success than

before ; and at length, tired and discouraged, she was glad, as a last resort, to leave the unfortunate shawl in the care of the kind old lady who had promised to dispose of it, if possible, and go home to cry out all her disappointment, and anxiety, and anger in the solitude of her own room.

CHAPTER X.

IF it had not been for the party, now so near at hand, Nelly would not, perhaps, have felt such immediate anxiety to replace the shoes. But, of course, when she came to dress, their loss would be discovered; and it was thus imperatively necessary that new ones should take their place before the arrival of the eventful evening.

Sometimes she thought she would not go; certainly she did not anticipate much pleasure; but when she considered how some of the girls had sneered, and insinuated that she had no invitation, and how coolly and capriciously they treated her, she felt determined to go at all risks; to look her prettiest and brightest, and make herself the life of the company, so as to show triumphantly what a great mistake Fanny Archer would have made, if she had indeed ventured to leave her out in the cold. Besides, all this disagreeable trouble would be over when once the new shoes were bought, and the possibility of

the discovery of her misconduct done away with ; and then it would be a very nice thing to be intimate with Fanny Archer, who had a nice home and very indulgent parents.

Nelly's mother, too, had taken it for granted that she would go, of course, when the written invitation had been sent in due form.

"I am very glad indeed," she said, "that you have got an opportunity of spending a pleasant evening; Nelly, though I don't think parties generally agree very well with a little girl's studies ; but it has been very dull at home, I know, in all this long sickness of mine, and you have not been in your usual spirits since you were sick ; I am sure it will do you good to go and have a nice time, and everything is all ready since your own party, so that there will be no trouble about your toilet whatever. I am very glad."

Little her mother knew, thought Nelly, what trouble there would be. Still it could not be helped ; she would have to go — nay, she *wanted* to go, and some way *must* be discovered to supply the shoes in time. Surely, surely, the shawl *would* be sold within the fortnight !

Every day, either on her way to or from school, Nelly stopped to inquire ; but a good-natur

shake of the head was the only reply to her anxious question; and so the time slipped by, feverishly enough to her, with her long waiting and watching; and now the very day of the party had arrived.

Those of the girls who were among the invited guests, were in a flutter of happy anticipation. Fanny Archer herself looked proudly conscious of being the heroine of the day; many and mysterious were the consultations which were held at recess and noon-time, and unusually eager the rush for cloaks and hats when school was dismissed, and the girls gathered in the wardrobe.

Nelly shared the general excitement; but, alas! hers was not the excitement of pleasure, but of anxiety. Before she went home those shoes must be obtained; but how, and by what means?

Once more she bent her steps to the little shop where she had left the worsted shawl. The old lady, who sat, as usual, knitting behind the counter, looked up in expectation of a customer, and, seeing it was only Nelly, said, rather impatiently, before Nelly could ask her oft-repeated question, —

“No, it isn’t sold yet, and I don’t much believe

it ever will be. At any rate, you needn't come again asking about it ; it makes too much trouble. If I sell it, I'll look out for you on your way to school, and tell you ; but you mustn't bother me any more about it."

Poor Nelly ! How mortified she felt ! She would have liked to give an indignant answer, but she did not dare to, lest she should lose her only chance of disposing of her unfortunate piece of handiwork ; and she could only leave the shop in silence and in shame, wishing, O, how earnestly ! that she had never been foolish enough to bring all this trouble upon herself. Not because she had *done wrong* ; not because she had sinned against God, against her parents, and her own conscience, in her repeated deceptions ; but only because it subjected her to annoyance, and disappointment, and fear of exposure. If she had felt one throb of real sorrow for her fault, and all the wicked falsehoods into which it had led her, she would have gone to her mother, and to her God, made full and free confession, and received full and free forgiveness. But, unhappily, Nelly's sorrow was not of that godly sort which worketh repentance ; and she greatly preferred trying to *hide* her wrong-doing, to the

humiliation of acknowledging it, even though that brought pardon and peace.

"I don't care," she said to herself, defiantly, and setting her teeth hard together, as she came out of the little old lady's shop; "everybody and everything is in a league to worry me, just as though I had committed the greatest crime in the world in wearing my own things when I chose to. I'll do it again if I like. I'm not a baby any more — I'm twelve years old. And I shall go now directly to Mr. Butler's and buy another pair of boots, and have them charged to father. I'll pay for them myself if I can, and if I can't he'll have to, and that's all there is about it."

In this desperate mood, she turned her steps in the direction of the shoe store, at which her mother was in the habit of dealing, and where the bronze boots, which were the unconscious cause of all her troubles, had been purchased.

She went in with a bold and confident air, and, as a clerk approached her, said, in a careless and natural tone, —

"My mother wishes me to be fitted to a pair of kid boots — bronze, with buttons — like those she bought for me here two or three months ago. Mrs. Morgan, you remember."

"Yes, I remember," said the clerk, politely ; "so your ma. liked those boots, did she, miss? Prime article they are, and you're just in time, I do believe, to get the last pair. Let's see : thirteens — weren't they?"

He was opening and shutting one box after another, and Nelly sat waiting, and trembling with a nervous fear, lest, perhaps, even the last pair might be gone, or lest possibly some one whom she knew might come into the shop.

"Please make haste ; I'm in a hurry," she said, impatiently ; and the clerk rattled the lids of the boxes, and looked anxious, and presently began, "I'm very sorry, miss, but I really am afraid—" and Nelly's heart sank like lead. *This* was a trial she had not expected, and it seemed *too* much.

The next moment, however, the young man's face brightened. "O, here they are! I *thought* we had one pair left;" and Nelly's heart jumped up again so suddenly as almost to choke her.

"Just your number, and just like the others. Allow me, miss," said the clerk, kneeling down, and beginning to unlace Nelly's high school balmoral; and Nelly watched the process of

fitting on the new boot, and looked at her pretty foot, so trim and dainty in its delicate bronze covering, with a flash of the old triumphant vanity in her black eyes.

“How pretty they are! and how nice my foot looks in them!” she thought, exultingly; “no one there to-night will look better than I shall. And I shall surely be able to pay for them; the shawl *must* be sold; and I’ll get mother to let me help her in her sewing after school hours, and earn money that way. O, it will all come out right, I know.”

And so still another step was taken in the network of deception, whose meshes were already closing so surely around the reckless girl.

“Those will do very nicely; you may put them up for me,” she said, holding out her foot to have the pretty new boot taken off. And then, as the young man was wrapping them up, she added, with a voice which it took a great effort to make steady, —

“My mother had not the money in the house, to-day, to pay for these; she said you were to charge them; she gets all our shoes here, you know. Mrs. Morgan, 105 John Street.”

The clerk hesitated a moment, and looked at

Nelly, who met his look with an unflinching gaze of her black eyes.

"Your mother has never had a bill here," he said, deprecatingly; "she always paid for everything on the spot. Excuse me, miss, but I'll just speak to Mr. Butler a minute."

The clerk went down to the other end of the store, and Nelly's heart once more sank in her breast. What if Mr. Butler should suspect something was wrong, and refuse to let her take the shoes? Would her troubles never end?

But Mrs. Morgan's credit at the store was too good for the proprietor to have any doubt about getting his money. In half a minute the clerk returned, with an apologetic smile and bow, and handed the parcel to Nelly.

"It's all right, miss," he said; "much obliged; hope they'll suit as well as the last;" and Nelly snatched the bundle with an eager hand, and hastened out of the store, half fearful, even now, lest something should happen to withdraw the coveted treasures from her possession.

She did not feel quite safe till she had reached home, and made her way unobserved up to the spare room. There, with nervous haste, she

unwrapped the boots, and laid them in the drawer, just where the others had been placed by her mother's careful hand, the day after the birthday party. And then, breathing more freely than she had for many days, she shut the drawer, and went down to her mother's room.

Mrs. Morgan was not yet entirely recovered, and the weather was so cold that it was not considered prudent for her to leave her room; so that Nelly was spared the close scrutiny of her motherly eyes during her dressing for the party. She had had a good many misgivings about the spots upon her white frock; but there was no danger now that they would be noticed in the hasty glimpse which she would give to her mother of her toilet after it was all completed. There was nothing, therefore, just now, to trouble her peace of mind, and she was so bright and gay, so like her old self, in the hour which she spent with her mother before tea, that Mrs. Morgan was more than ever convinced that a little pleasant excitement would do her good, and pleased that an opportunity had occurred for her having it.

The tea things were left to be cleared up at a later hour, after supper was over; and the good-

natured Anne went up stairs to officiate as lady's maid when the time for making the grand toilet arrived. Her indiscriminating eyes took no note of the signs of rough usage upon the dress; and as the rubbed places were all in the back breadth, Mrs. Morgan did not perceive them, either. For Nelly came rustling down stairs, looking so pretty and so bright, in her cloud of gauzy drapery, and floating ribbons, with such a flush on her cheek, and such a sparkle in her eye, and stood blushing and bowing, and fluttering her skirts, with such a gay, coquettish air, that her mother only thought, with a smile of pleasure, that her little daughter would probably be as pretty and as well dressed as any of her companions; and in the one rapid whirl which Nelly gave "to show herself all round," as she said, laughing to hide her anxiety, the faint spots which still remained here and there among the fleecy folds, half hidden by the broad, floating sash, escaped notice entirely; and so the last danger was averted, as Nelly thought, with a thrill of triumph, bending over to kiss her mother good night, and calling Anne to wrap her cloak around her.

The thought of the payment for the shoes

Nelly put resolutely out of her mind, and that left nothing to mar the enjoyment of the evening. It was a very pleasant party ; for a wonder, there were plenty of boys for the girls, and Fanny Archer, whose mother had taught her to consider the pleasure of her guests before her own, took care that everybody had partners, and that no one was left out of the games.

And such pleasant and merry old-fashioned games they had!—and such fun over the mottoes, and such enjoyment of all the dainties so abundantly provided! It was really very delightful altogether ; and for the time Nelly forgot all her troubles and anxieties, and was as gay as the gayest.

She had always been a leader at school in all sorts of fun and frolic, and she entered into the spirit of the enjoyment so thoroughly this evening, proposed so many nice plays, and did so much to keep up the general merriment, that Fanny Archer quite wondered how she could have thought of not inviting such an agreeable girl, and paid her very especial attention. The guests, of course, followed the lead of their hostess, and everybody wanted to be introduced to “ that nice girl in white Swiss, with the dark

eyes and hair, and laughing face." All the boys wanted her for a partner, and all the girls said they should call upon her; and altogether Nelly had quite as great a triumph as heart could wish, and glowed inly with gratified vanity and the excitement of success.

But when it was all over, and she had drained the cup of pride and pleasure to the dregs, the sting of the serpent lay in the bottom. As she lay tossing upon her bed that night, too excited to sleep, the thought would come again and again, What a fearful price she had paid for the triumph of the evening! and the bitter question, Was it worth the cost?

CHAPTER XI.

MRS. MORGAN found herself disappointed in her hope that a little pleasurable excitement would rouse Nelly out of the strange, morbid mood which had clung to her ever since her illness. The glow of gratified vanity brightened her up for a few days; but the old anxious cloud soon came back, and Mrs. Morgan perplexed herself in vain to conjecture the cause of so sudden a change in her daughter. Nelly had never been specially sweet-tempered or lovely; but she was one of those strong, active, high-spirited children, who fill a house with the sounds of merry and busy childish life. Never quiet; now here, now there; laughing and singing, or, perhaps, quarrelling; at any rate, always full of bustle and animation, — she had been the life of the house. Now she moped about with a sullen face and silent voice, and seemed to desire nothing so much as that her mother should employ her, with a promise of payment, to

assist her in needle-work after school-hours were over. Mrs. Morgan could not conjecture what special need she had for money, nor guess, in the least, what was the cause of her altered manner ; but the mystery was soon to be resolved.

One Saturday her mother asked Nelly to take Jennie round to Mr. Butler's, and have her fitted with a pair of stout school shoes.

"It is so damp I scarcely dare venture out myself," she said ; but Nelly answered ungraciously, —

"Then why can't Anne go, mother? I don't feel like it ;" for she did not indeed "feel like" entering again the store where she had told such unblushing falsehoods, and where her debt was still unpaid.

"Because Anne is busy, my dear ; and, besides, I would much rather trust you to see that the shoes fit properly. Come, get your hat and cloak ; it will do you good to go out ; you have been moping in the house all day."

Mrs. Morgan spoke decidedly, though gently, and Nelly knew she must obey. She put down her work with a jerk, and slammed the door as she went out of the room ; and you may be sure little Jennie found her sister no very pleasant

companion, as she hurried her angrily along towards the store. Her mother had given her the money to pay for the shoes, and as Nelly handed it to Mr. Butler, who himself waited upon her, he asked, a little hesitatingly, —

“Your mother didn’t send the money for your boots — did she, miss?”

The quick blood rushed to Nelly’s face.

“Di—didn’t she?” she stammered, not knowing what to say. “I suppose she forgot it; but I’ll speak to her about it when I go home.”

“What boots, Nelly?” asked little Jenny, who was listening. “I didn’t know you had been buying any.”

“It’s none of your business,” answered Nelly, sharply. “Don’t be asking meddlesome questions.”

The child was silent, abashed at the rebuke; but the shopkeeper noticed the scene with curious eyes. “Something wrong here, I believe,” he thought; “Mrs. Morgan always pays for everything when she buys it, and I guess this young miss has been doing a little shopping on her own account.”

“I’ll just give you a little bill of it,” he said; “ours is a cash concern, you know, and your

mother has always been a cash customer. I'm sure she's forgotten it."

"O, no, you needn't give me any bill," said Nelly, hastily; "I'll speak to her about it, and bring the money on my way to school, on Monday;" and she looked furtively at Jennie; but Jennie was busy watching a pretty little child, who was being fitted with a pair of tiny blue kid slippers, and didn't seem to have heard what was said.

But the shopman noticed the hurried glance, and was more than ever suspicious that something was wrong.

"Very well, miss, it will be all right, no doubt," he said; but he resolved, inwardly, that if it were *not* all right, and the money did not come on Monday, the bill should go.

So Nelly went home with a double anxiety — the fear of the bill being sent in, and the fear of Jennie's asking her mother the same question which she had asked herself in the store. She endeavored to avert this last calamity by giving the child a round scolding, as soon as she got her into the street, for being meddlesome and inquisitive; and then, after she had brought her to tears of terror and shame, she took her into

a confectioner's shop, and treated her to sugar-plums, as a reward for the promise never again to ask impertinent questions. Her usual "good luck," as she called it, helped her to evade the former misfortune; for, the money not coming on Monday, — as Nelly knew very well it would not, when she promised it, and Mr. Butler being a shrewd and cautious man of business, — the bill was duly sent. But it so happened, that just as the boy rang the bell at the Morgans' door, Nelly was coming up the steps, just home from school, and recognized the lad as errand boy at the shoe store.

"A bill, isn't it, from Mr. Butler's? All right — I'll take it," she said; and the boy had just left the stoop, and the coarse yellow envelope barely found its way into her pocket, when Anne opened the door, and seeing no one but Nelly, grumbled a little that she couldn't come in at the basement door, and "lave her to her work."

But Nelly didn't stop to give her a proud answer, as she ordinarily would have done; her heart was beating wildly at this last narrow escape, and she was glad to rush up to her own room, and, locking the door, give vent to her excitement unobserved.

She sank upon a chair, breathless and trembling, at first; but presently, when she grew calmer, she tore open the envelope, and there, sure enough, were the fateful words which would have revealed her shameful secret: —

“J. W. Morgan to Henry Butler, Dr.”

Nelly glanced at the bill with a look of aversion, and then tore it into tiny pieces, and threw them into the slop-jar.

“Thank fortune, that is over for a day or two,” she said, with a long-drawn breath; “but he’ll be sure to send it in again—the stingy creature; or, if he doesn’t, he’ll speak to mother about it the first time she goes into the store. I wish I had never seen him or his horrid shoes. *They* have brought all this trouble upon me.”

Poor Nelly! it did not occur to her to think that it was her own vanity, love of dress, and deceitfulness, which had brought her into this strait; nor, in all her desperate plans for escape, did she think of the plain way of confession and amendment.

She sat in her fireless room, brooding over her trouble, until she grew numb with cold, and then crept down stairs like a guilty thing, shrinking into corners, and ashamed to look any one openly

in the face, wearing such a pale and wretched aspect, meanwhile, that both her father and mother noticed it, asked kindly if she was not well, and puzzled themselves vainly to think what had come over their once bright, cheerful, and fun-loving daughter.

In the same miserable mood she went to school next day, walking along the busy streets lonely and wretched, noticing nothing, except to give a hopeless glance into the little old lady's shop as she passed, to see if *possibly* any one might be watching for her, to convey the glad tidings that the shawl was sold at last, and the money waiting for her. But no; no such happy surprise was in store for her, and the poor girl went on her way with an added pang at her heart, and took her seat at her desk alone, too miserable to wish to speak or be spoken to.

And yet all the rest of Miss Kavanagh's class seemed to be in a state of high excitement; school was not yet opened, and some of the girls stood about in groups, talking eagerly; others were at the blackboards, dashing off, in excited haste, examples in arithmetic, and imploring one and another of the better scholars to "just tell them once more about this or that;

they were *sure* they should forget it, and make dunces of themselves, when Mr. Burton examined them." Others still were rapidly turning over the leaves of Grammars and Geographies, refreshing their memories on difficult points; and Nelly remembered that this was "Promotion-week," that the superintendent of the schools had been examining the lower classes for several days, and that he was to visit theirs to-day.

Indeed, she saw him now sitting on the platform, talking with the principal and some of the teachers, Miss Kavanagh among them; but she felt no interest in the matter. She was too much absorbed with her own imminent trouble to care for anything outside of it; and, besides, she knew there was no prospect of her promotion. Quick and clever as she was, she had always thought too much of dress and amusement ever to make a diligent scholar; and her fortnight's absence during her illness had thrown her hopelessly behindhand. It was only another bitter drop in the cup of her misery to feel that she was entirely unprepared for examination, and know that she should disgrace herself by repeated failures, and by remaining in the second class, while all her companions, except the few

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notoriously idle or dull, would pass up to a higher grade, and have the honor of being under the immediate charge of the lady principal herself. It was only another drop, and Nelly swallowed it with a bitter gulp, and sat at her seat silent and sullen, assuming a haughty indifference to the whole matter, which was filling the rest of the class with excitement and anxiety.

Just as she had expected, she failed constantly in answering the questions addressed to her in the course of the examination, and just as she expected, her name was not upon the list of those considered ready for promotion when the examination was ended.

She did not feel sorry nor ashamed; her heart was too bitter for that now; only indignant, when Mr. Burton asked, in a tone of displeased surprise, why it was that such a tall, intelligent-looking girl should be so far behind her mates; nor was she at all grateful when Miss Kavanagh, although displeased herself, did her the justice to say that she had been detained from school by a severe illness, from which she did not seem to have recovered with her usual tone of mind.

She put on a defiant, don't-care look when her proud and happy companions marched, blushing

and smiling, into the front room, where they were henceforward to wear the honorable title of the "First Class;" and she answered with a glance of cool disdain some simple remark which one of the acknowledged "stupids" of the class, also left behind, ventured to address to her as a companion in misfortune.

She carried her disgrace with a high head in presence of others, but tears of bitter mortification and anger gushed to her eyes when once she was safely out into the street; and her afternoon and evening at home were no happier than had been those of the previous day.

The hardest thing to bear of it all was the taking her seat the next morning among the crowd of smaller girls, promoted from the third class, upon whom she had always looked down in the play-room, and wherever else she happened to meet them, as "mere little chits, not worth noticing." Now they were her classmates, and enforced companions, with equal rights and honors as herself; and she detected them glancing at her from time to time with looks half curious, half contemptuous, as having failed of the promotion which they themselves had obtained.

Nelly returned these glances with icy disdain, but they stung her none the less; and all this mortification, added to her harassing special anxiety, made her utterly reckless, and ready to do any wicked and desperate deed.

There was very little regular study or recitation that day; the forty new scholars in each class had to be provided with sets of new books before the lessons of the higher grade could be appointed or prepared. Mr. Porter, the principal of the school, was busy in the library all day with two or three of his older boys, filling up orders for books as they were sent in, and counting the money, which the children had brought from home to pay for them. The teachers occupied themselves principally in entering the names of the promoted pupils on their roll books, in explaining to them their own particular rules, to which they required obedience from their class, and in writing the separate list of books.

This was no slight task, as very few of the girls needed exactly the same, almost all of them having one or more of the text-books, which had descended to them from some older brother or sister. The counting of the money, too, was

troublesome and tedious, as it came in innumerable pieces of fractional currency, with very few large bills, and yet mounted up to a considerable sum.

Miss Kavanagh, pitying Nelly for the mortification which she knew she was feeling, and knowing, too, that she was quick and clever, called her to her side, and employed her in separating the various ten, twenty-five, and fifty-cent stamps, and laying them in separate piles for more convenient counting; and, when at last the lists were all made out, and the money duly summed up, she sent her to carry both to the library, and see that the books were selected, and brought to the class-room.

Nelly's pride had been soothed by being chosen thus to assist her teacher in responsible work; but even this had, nevertheless, a source of torment for her. She looked with greedy eyes at the piles of money lying on the desk, and as bill after bill passed through her fingers, they itched with almost uncontrollable desire to close upon some of them, "just enough to save her from detection and disgrace," and rush desperately from the room with her prize.

But, of course, she knew that could not be

done and she went on counting the money with trembling and covetous fingers, not daring to appropriate a single penny of it, even in this hour of her extremity. When she went into the library, she found there a scene of busy bustle and hurry. It was getting to be late in the afternoon ; it was important that the children should have their books before school was dismissed, in order to have their lessons appointed for the morrow ; and the orders were coming in so thick and fast as to keep the principal and his young assistants exceedingly busy.

As Nelly entered, several girls, also holding book-lists, and envelopes full of money, stood near the door, waiting their turn to be served ; but Nelly, with her usual quick and imperious manner, pushed her way to a place in front of them. As she did so, she jostled one of the girls against a small stand, covered with loose pieces of money, which one of the boys had just emptied from an envelope, and was certifying, before handing out the books, for which it was to pay.

The stand tottered with the rude shock, and the loose bills flew here and there over the floor. There was an impatient exclamation, and Mr.

Porter came hastily from the other end of the room, where he was registering the different sums of money in a great cash-book, to inquire what was the matter.

“Only some money scattered on the floor. We’ll pick it up.” “It was Nelly Morgan’s fault; she’s always so topping.” “It was an accident, I think; some one jostled the table.” These and a dozen other exclamations replied to his question, while every one stooped to pick up the scattered stamps, which had fluttered in every direction.

Nelly, abashed at the reproving glance which the principal directed towards her, busied herself with the rest; and, as she bent down and helped to gather up the fugitive pieces, a sight met her eye which sent all the blood in one great throb to her heart, and made her almost faint, for a moment, with the rush of conflicting emotions.

Behind a great pile of “Websters,” which had been stacked upon the floor, half hidden under one of the shelves of the library, where she was sure no one but herself perceived it, lay a crisp new greenback with the stamp 5 very plainly visible.

It was really a five-dollar bill, but to Nelly it was more than that: it was absolute salvation from disgrace, and from the well-merited anger of her parents; and the temptation to take it was simply irresistible to her in her desperate mood. She flitted her skirt dexterously over it, clutched it with burning fingers, thrust it close down into her high balmoral boot, and then, picking up again a few smaller bills, which she had laid down for the moment, rose and handed them to the boy; and, in the confusion of the moment, no one noticed how deathly pale was Nelly Morgan, nor how her heart beat, nor how her lips moved convulsively once or twice with the words "Saved, saved!"

Neither did they notice specially how suddenly the blood rushed back to her face, nor how she trembled, and clung to a chair for support, when the boy, carefully re-counting the money, pronounced it five dollars short of the amount marked upon the envelope.

For there was an immediate chorus of exclamations — "Is it, really?" "Too bad!" "We must look again;" and the search was again instituted, everybody peering into nooks and crannies, under shelves, behind piles of

books, and in every place where it seemed possible for money to hide itself.

But no five-dollar greenback was perceptible ; and, after long and fruitless seeking, Mr. Porter said to the girl whose money it was which had been thrown from the table, —

“Your teacher must have made some mistake in the amount she marked upon the envelope. It seems impossible that, if the money had really been dropped here, it should not be found. Go and ask Miss Elliott to be so good as to come to the library.”

The girl went out, and returned immediately with her teacher ; but she, of course, was quite positive that there had been no mistake on her part ; and a pause followed of very disagreeable feeling to every one. At last Mr. Porter said, —

“Well, there is nothing further to be done just now, and it is time for school to be dismissed. I will have the room thoroughly cleared and searched before I go home, and, if the money is not found, we can consider to-morrow what is best to be done. The girls must have their books, of course, if I pay for them myself.”

The terrible strain upon Nelly's self-control relaxed a little ; danger was over for the present,

and before to-morrow the money would be safe in Mr. Butler's hands. She went back to the school-room with the rest, and found the classes preparing for dismissal. In a few minutes more she was out on the street, and stooping, under the pretence of fastening an untied shoe-string, she seized the stolen bill, and hastened with guilty speed to get rid of it, and all her troubles with it, at the shoe store.

CHAPTER XII.

BREATHLESS with excitement, and with her rapid walk, Nelly entered the shop; and, looking neither to the right nor the left in her feverish haste, walked directly up to the counter.

"Here is the money, Mr. Butler," she said, "for those bronze boots I bought here a few weeks ago. My mother is very sorry it has not been attended to before, but she has been sick, and things have been neglected."

"O, it is of no consequence," replied the man, bowing politely, and feeling quite ashamed of his suspicions. "I only sent in the bill because I knew Mr. Morgan did not like long-standing accounts. Won't you sit down, miss? and I'll give you a receipt. You look all tired out, as if you'd been running."

"O, no; I don't care about any receipt; it's all right," said Nelly, hastily, and turning quickly to leave the shop, now become so hateful to

her. As she did so, she came face to face with Miss Elliott, the very teacher whose money had been found wanting. A pang of fear shot through Nelly's heart, and she thought, Could she possibly have seen the note and recognized it? And then, ashamed of her own fears, she said to herself, "As though there were only one five-dollar greenback in the world!" and, with a hasty bow, passed out of the store into the street.

Meanwhile, the shopkeeper turned to his customer with a smile, smoothing out the crumpled bill in his hand.

And Miss Elliott, looking at the note, so crisp and new; remembering that Nelly Morgan had been in the library when the five-dollar bill so mysteriously disappeared; remembering, too, seeing her pass her in breathless haste upon the street, though she herself was walking very fast, wishing to do some shopping before going home; recalling her eager hurry in the shop just now, so great that she did not even notice one of the teachers from the school standing just at her side, and the apology she made for the money not being paid when it was due; thinking of all these things, as she glanced at the new and

clean but crumpled note, Miss Elliott felt, with a sudden flash of conviction, almost certain that this was the very five-dollar bill which was missing from her book-money; and alas! that Nelly Morgan, a well brought up and intelligent girl, belonging to a family of perfect respectability, and a pupil of one of the highest classes of the school, *was a thief!*

It was a dreadful thing to believe, and Miss Elliott was exceedingly reluctant to believe it; but her duty to herself, to the girl by whom she had sent the money to the library, who might be wrongfully suspected of having taken some of it out of the envelope, her duty to all the other scholars who assisted in looking for the lost note, and to the principal of the school himself, who might decide to make up the deficiency from his own pocket; her duty to all these compelled her to think that an investigation should be made, and she decided to go directly back to the school, and consult with Mr. Porter before he should leave for home.

In the first place, however, she said carelessly to the shopman, —

“I know that little girl; she is one of our scholars. Did she say she bought such an

expensive pair of shoes herself? Was not her mother with her?"

"No," said the man; "she was alone when she bought them, and she's been a good while bringing the money to pay for them, which is a little strange, for her mother's a regular customer of mine, but always pays cash. However, the young miss said she was sick, and I suppose she hasn't thought of it. It's all right, I guess."

But Miss Elliott was very much afraid that it was all wrong. She did not wish, however, to let the shopman know her suspicions; so she made her own purchases at once, and then hastened back to the school to communicate her fears to the principal.

Meanwhile Nelly, little dreaming what dread danger was threatening her, was hastening home in a whirl of excited and opposing emotions. Relieved from the terrible fear of open disgrace she was; but what secret shame and self-loathing sickened her soul when she thought that, though the world might never know it, *she* could never forget that *Nelly Morgan was a thief!* Not merely a disobedient and deceitful girl, but a *criminal* in the eye of the law, who, if detected, might be taken up by any of those great,

strong, stern-looking policemen, and dragged before a magistrate, amid crowds of scoffing rabble, and sent to some house of correction, or perhaps imprisoned in some horrible, filthy cell!

The very idea made the miserable girl shiver with disgust and dread; and, happening suddenly to come upon one of those same tall, blue-coated gentry, she shrank away, like the guilty thing she was, and hurried past him, though the man smiled civilly enough, and offered to help her across the muddy street.

She felt angry with herself for her own weakness the moment after, and tried to encourage herself with the thought that she had meant no wrong in the first place; that there was no such great harm in wearing her own clothes where and when she liked; that it was the fault of the girls who ridiculed her that she had forgotten her rubbers and spoiled her shoes; that it was an evil and malicious fate which had prevented the sale of the work with which she intended to replace them; that the purchase of the second pair of boots was the fault of the girls again, who, by their sneers and coldness, made her determine to go to the party; that the party

itself, coming just at that time, was a special temptation to make her do wrong; that Mr. Butler's impatience for his money was an aggravation expressly ordered to drive her to desperation; and that the accident of the money falling directly in her way was a temptation which no human being in her circumstances could have resisted.

Any and everything she seized upon as an excuse, a justification; but none of it brought her much comfort, and she went on her way, if possible more wretched, more despairing, than when she trod the same path that morning, not knowing when or where to obtain money to save her from detection.

So true is it that "the way of the transgressor *is hard*."

She thought that nothing more could be left to happen to her; but as she was passing the little old lady's thread and needle shop, the little old lady herself suddenly appeared at the door, and beckoned her in with a good-natured smile.

Nelly went in, half bewildered, and the kind-hearted shopkeeper said, with a look and tone of real pleasure, —

"Well, my dear, I'm glad to tell you that the

shawl is sold at last. A lady came in, not an hour ago, to buy some small wares, cottons and tapes, and such things, and spied this shawl lying on the counter. I always kept it spread out where people could see it, you seemed so anxious to sell it, and I felt kind o' sorry for your disappointment, though I did speak up rather sharp to you about coming so often."

Nelly managed to smile and say, "Thank you ; no matter ;" and the old lady prattled on.

"Well, the lady seemed very much struck with that shawl, and asked me where I had got it. I thought it was a queer question, but she appeared to admire the work so much that I told her, — and I hope you won't mind it, my dear, for I'm sure it's very creditable to you to be so industrious — that it was brought here by a little girl who had made it herself, and who seemed to want money very much for something particular, — some girl's finery, I supposed, — and so I had promised to sell it for her if I could.

"Well, she examined it very closely, and said she thought it was very nice work for a little girl, and asked if you were really only a child. And I said, O, no ; you were quite a young miss, and that you had bright black eyes, that looked

smart enough for anything, as I don't doubt you are, my dear."

"Well?" gasped Nelly, scarcely able to control her impatience.

"Well, but you mustn't hurry me; I'm telling you as fast as I can. The lady examined the shawl very particular, as I said; and then she stood and thought for a minute, and then she said she'd take it, and asked the price. So I told her I was very glad for the little girl's sake, and that she wanted five dollars for it, and I thought it was worth the money. She said she thought so, too, and handed it to me at once. So here it is, my dear, a bran-new five-dollar note. Take it, and I wish you good luck with it."

Nelly put out her hand mechanically, and took the note, but stood still, without speaking, leaning against the counter, pale, and with a set, bitter face. *How hard, how cruel*, she thought, it was for this to come just now. Had she had it one half hour ago, she need not have become a *thief!*

It seemed a bitter mockery, too cruel to be borne. What did she care for the pitiful money *now?* And for a moment she was tempted to tear the bank note into a hundred pieces, and stamp them under her heel.

But in another instant a happy thought flashed, like lightning, across her stormy mind. It was a clean, new five-dollar bill, just such a crisp, fresh-looking one as that which she had stolen and paid away. It was not yet four o'clock; doubtless the school-house was still open, the janitor sweeping out the class-rooms, and Mr. Porter still busy in the library. Why could she not go back, pretending that she had forgotten some of her books, and give the note to the principal, telling him that she had picked it up in Miss Elliott's class-room, where it had probably dropped on the floor, when she was putting her money into the envelope, and been hidden under some of the girl's long dresses? That would be a very natural story. Mr. Porter would be too glad at getting the money to think of questioning her word, and no one would ever know anything about it.

Here, at last, seemed a safe and sure way out of all her trials; and as Nelly fairly comprehended the blessed possibility, such a rush of gladness came over her, that she staggered, and seemed as though she would have fainted from the sudden revulsion of feeling.

The little old lady looked at her in amazed disappointment.

"Well," she said, "I thought you'd be delighted at what I've done for you, and instead of that, you look as if you'd had a blow, and haven't got a word of thanks. What ails you, child?"

Nelly made a strong effort, and regained her self-control.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am," she said, humbly; "indeed, I am delighted; it was because I was so pleased I couldn't speak. I'm sure I'm ever and ever so much obliged to you, and I'll tell everybody I know how kind you are, and what a nice shop you've got. I must go now; I'm in a great hurry; but I'll be sure to come in and see you again. Good by, ma'am." And she was gone before the little old lady could make up her mind whether to be angry or pleased with the strange girl.

Back to the school-house, as fast as she could go, Nelly went, and up the long staircases with flying feet. The janitor had just finished sweeping the room below Miss Elliott's, and was about entering hers with his great broom and dust-pan; but Nelly brushed past him, and walked rapidly between the long rows of desks. Suddenly she stooped, as if to pick up something, and uttered a loud exclamation of delight.

“What have you got there?” grumbled out the old man; “and what are you comin’ back here for, after school’s out, any way? You know it’s agin the rules.”

“Never you mind,” said Nelly, pertly; “what I’ve found I’m going to Mr. Porter with; so don’t distress yourself;” and with that she pushed on through the long suit of class-rooms, and knocked at the library door.

“Come in,” called the principal’s voice; and Nelly entered boldly, sure that there was no possibility of his suspecting anything wrong. What was her consternation to find Miss Elliott seated there, and to see that the two had evidently been engaged in grave and unpleasant consultation.

Nelly felt the guilty blood rush burning to her face, and she trembled so that she could scarcely stand; but both principal and teacher were surveying her with cold, scrutinizing looks, and Mr. Porter said, in a *waiting* tone, “Well, young lady, what is it you want? Speak, if you please.”

So Nelly made a tremendous effort, and came forward with a tolerable assumption of composure.

“If you please, Mr. Porter,” she said, trying

to speak her lie steadily, "I think I have found the five-dollar bill which you thought was lost in this room. At least I picked this up just now in Miss Elliott's room, and I thought I had better bring it to you at once."

Miss Elliott started, and looked sharply at the girl; but Nelly kept her eyes upon Mr. Porter's face. He took the note, and glanced at it, then handed it to the young lady, who examined it keenly.

"And how happened you to be passing through Miss Elliott's room, so long after school is dismissed?" asked the principal of Nelly.

"I forgot my geography, sir, and came back for it," answered Nelly, promptly.

Mr. Porter turned to Miss Elliot.

"Do you remember having any such new-looking bill among your book-money?" he asked. "Do you think it is yours?"

"I certainly put such a bill into the envelope," replied the teacher. "But that it could have got out of that, on the floor, and remained there unseen, even after the girls had left the room, seems to me a simple impossibility."

"O, no," said Mr. Porter, with a half smile. "It would not be *impossible*, though certainly

rather careless, to drop one of so many pieces of paper money —”

“And,” interrupted Nelly, boldly, “you know you left the class-room as soon as the girls did, Miss Elliott. I saw you in Butler’s shoe store.”

“Yes, and I saw *you* there,” rejoined Miss Elliott, sharply, indignant at the cool audacity of the girl, whom she verily believed to be witnessing falsely. “And I saw you pay Mr. Butler just such a clean, new bill as this, and as the one that was lost; and he said it was for an expensive pair of shoes, which you had bought *alone*, and that the payment had been delayed for several weeks, although your mother had never before allowed an account to be kept running.”

* Nelly reddened, but answered steadily, —

“I *did* give him such a bill, and what he told you was quite correct. It *was* to pay for the shoes which I wore to Fanny Archer’s party. My mother has been sick for more than a month, and could not go with me to buy them; and that is the reason why the paying for them has been neglected. Yesterday he sent in his bill, and this morning my mother gave me the money to settle it; but I was too late to stop on my way to school, and so I went in this afternoon.”

The girl told her story in a straightforward, respectful way, and Mr. Porter turned to Miss Elliott with a smile.

“Come, Miss Elliott,” he said, pleasantly, “I rather think you are mistaken, and that we owe this little girl a vote of thanks for having such bright eyes as to find the money, and such an honest heart as to bring it straight to headquarters. I think we had better put it away, and say no more about it.”

“I suppose we shall have to,” said Miss Elliott, shortly. “But it is very difficult for me to believe that I could have dropped that note without knowing it.” Then, looking sharply and suspiciously at Nelly, she sunk her voice to a whisper, and said to Mr. Porter, “I must say, I should like to take means to find out whether that story of the shoes and her mother’s sickness is true.”

But the principal shook his head, and whispered back, decidedly, “No, no; it would never do. It would make no end of trouble, in school and out. Besides, I really think you are too severe; I see no reason to doubt her story; and where could she have got another bill to replace the lost one so soon? No. I am glad the money

is found, and I shall tell her so, and dismiss her at once."

So he raised his head, and, with a kind word or two of thanks, told Nelly that she might go; and the girl, overjoyed at having made good her escape in spite of Miss Elliott's unsatisfied suspicions, made haste to leave the room and the building which had been the scene of such strange and painful events.

Lightly, as though her feet were winged, she sped on her homeward way, and, for the first time in weeks, entered into the house with a burst of merry song. Still gayly carolling her light-hearted lay, she ran up stairs to her own room.

On the threshold she paused, struck dumb with horror.





CHAPTER XIII.

IN Nelly's own little sewing-chair, beside the window, evidently waiting for her, sat her mother, pale, and with a countenance both angry and sorrowful. Across the foot of the low, white bed lay the *veritable breakfast shawl*, looking warm and bright, with its gay shades of scarlet. On a chair, near by, stood two pairs of bronze kid boots, of the same size, and exactly alike, except that the delicate leather of the one was all warped and stained by mud and water, while the others were glossy and fresh with newness.

Nelly saw, in one rapid and desperate glance, that her sin had found her out. These mute witnesses had silently told the tale, and there was nothing for her to do now, but bear her disgrace as best she might. With a low cry of pain and shame, she sank into a chair near the bed, and buried her face in the pillows. She could not bear to meet her mother's eye.

Mrs. Morgan looked at the shame-bowed

figure of her daughter with a sad and displeased glance. Presently she called, —

“Nelly!”

But Nelly only shrank at the sound of her voice, and did not rise.

“Nelly, come here! I wish to speak to you.”

Mrs. Morgan’s tone was cold and severe, and Nelly did not dare to disobey. She lifted her head heavily, and, striving vainly to hide her shame-dyed face with her trembling fingers, rose, and slowly approached the spot where her mother sat. “Uncover your face, Nelly, and look at me. That ever *my* daughter should be ashamed to meet her mother’s eye!”

The poor girl unclasped her hands from her burning face, and bent a frightened and pleading glance upon the sad, displeased countenance that looked so severely upon her.

“Don’t be so angry with me, mother — don’t!” she begged, taking a step forward, and clasping her hands with a beseeching gesture. “Indeed, I didn’t mean to do anything so very wrong at first; but everything seemed to happen, and — and —”

She stopped, and, burying her face in her hands again, broke into a passion of bitter sobs.

“Didn’t mean! — *didn’t mean!*” repeated her mother, scornfully. “Never say that to me, Nelly! It is the pitiful excuse which the wicked, who are not brave enough to take the consequences of their wickedness, always offer. I do not wish to hear any excuses. I want a full and free explanation of all these mysteries, a full and free confession of all your deceptions. It is your only chance for forgiveness; so be careful to tell me the exact truth now. Why did you make me believe you intended to give this shawl to your teacher, when it was your purpose to sell it, even if you had to disgrace both me and yourself by hawking it about in the public shops? When did you wear these shoes, that you should get them so stained and spoiled? Why did you not come and show them to me, instead of hiding them away in a hole of the attic wall, where the very *rats* could betray you? For it was by a rat jumping down, and dragging one of those shoes after him, that Anne discovered them as she was cleaning in the attic to-day. And how did you buy the others to replace them without money? I want an explicit answer to each of these questions; and remember, Nelly, that I shall not forgive

any evasion or prevarication. Begin at the beginning, and tell me how you ruined your shoes ; for, I suppose, that was the origin of the deception about the shawl."

So Nelly began, with drooping face, and in a low, ashamed voice, to tell the sad story of her first deceit, and how, day by day, she had become entangled closer and closer in the web of falsehood, until it had ended in actual crime ; and her mother sat and listened in a shame and grief almost as deep as her own.

When she had finished, there was a dead silence in the room. Mrs. Morgan sat lost in painful thought, and did not know what to say or do.

This solemn pause grew quite awful to Nelly, and she broke it presently with an exceeding bitter cry.

"O, mother, mother," she said, with streaming eyes, "do forgive me ! Indeed, if you knew how miserable I have been from the very first day, though I tried to brave it out ; how many, many times I wished I had never begun to deceive you ; how hard I tried to get out of it all without telling you, because I was so ashamed to have you know I could be so wicked ; and how I have felt some-

times I had rather *die* than go on so, you would, — I am sure you would, — mother — mother !”

And Mrs. Morgan remembered how miserable indeed the poor girl had looked ever since that sorrowful Christmas Eve ; how she had spent the merry holiday time, when other children were so gay and happy, on a bed of pain ; and how of late she had seemed to be struggling under a burden of anxiety too heavy for so young a heart to bear. And, looking at her now, humbled to the very dust, conscience-stricken and ashamed, and listening to her piteous cry, the mother’s heart softened towards her erring child, and she felt that her punishment was indeed severe enough.

“ O, Nelly, Nelly !” she said, in a tone of sorrowful wistfulness, “ if I only could believe that you were truly sorry — sorry for your sin itself, not alone for the trouble it has brought upon you ; if I could only hope that it was the kind of sorrow which would work such deep repentance that you could never, never be tempted to commit such sin again !”

Nelly sank upon her knees by her mother’s side, and buried her face in her bosom.

“ I do not ask you to trust me again yet,

mother," she sobbed; "only forgive me now, and try me once more. I have suffered so much that it seems to me I could die before I could tell another lie. And it isn't only the suffering either I mind. I see now, as I never did before, how mean and how wrong it is. O, mother, you could not wish me to be more ashamed and sorry than I am!"

Mrs. Morgan's eyes filled with tears. She stroked the hair gently from the feverish brow of the weeping girl, and said, solemnly, —

"You know, Nelly, mine is not the only forgiveness you should seek."

"Do you mean that I should tell my father, mother?" asked Nelly, with a start, and a new pang of shame and fear.

"Don't you think that you would be more likely to resist any temptation that may come to you in the future, Nelly, if you had to remember the pain of confessing this to him as well as to me? And a stronger reason than that; don't you think it would be a kind of *keeping up* deception if you kept this great fault hidden from him who has a right to know all about you? if you allowed him to think that you had always been honest and true, and esteem, and,

perhaps, *praise* you, for those qualities, when, in reality, you do not possess them? Could you not look him in the face more bravely and openly, after the first pain was over, than you could if you were conscious, all the time, of appearing to him in a better light than you deserved? Think about it, Nelly. It is hard, I know; but do you not deserve, and *need*, to bear some hardship for your sin?"

Nelly drew a long, quivering breath of shame and pain.

"I will tell him, mother," she said, in a low, humbled tone. "I see I ought to, but I am sorry to make him feel so badly."

"And I am sorry, too," said her mother; "but you see that is one of the sad consequences of evil-doing. 'None of us liveth to himself, and none dieth to himself;' and we must always bring others into trouble, as well as ourselves, when we do wrong. But, Nelly, though I meant, of course, that your father should know of this, it was not to him I referred, when I spoke of another's forgiveness being needed."

"You did not mean Mr. Porter, or Miss Elliott, mother?" asked Nelly, aghast. "O, I never could tell them, mother, that — that I had —

had *stolen*, mother ! ” and her face grew all aflame again, and a sick feeling of shame and degradation came over her. Mrs. Morgan’s cheek, too, burned with the reflection of her daughter’s disgrace. She sat silent for a moment in very unpleasant thought, and then said, gravely, —

“ I do not know that there is any real principle of right and wrong involved in your making a confession to them, Nelly. You repaired your fault so quickly that no suspicion or trouble was brought upon any one else ; and, perhaps, an explanation of the real state of the case would do no good to any one but yourself. But would it not do *you* good, Nelly ? Would you not feel more honest and true in your teacher’s presence ? Would you not have more confidence in your own purpose to sin no more in the future, if you bravely took upon yourself all the consequences of the present error ? ”

Nelly remained silent with covered face. These were hard lines, indeed. Her punishment seemed greater than she could bear.

Her mother waited a moment, and then said, kindly, —

“ That question need not be decided just yet, Nelly. You can think about it, and see what

your own heart will bid you do by and by. But it is against a *higher* Power than your father, or myself, or your teachers, that you have sinned most deeply, Nelly. I want to feel sure, my daughter, that you realize your offence towards *God*, and his just displeasure. Unless your repentance is such as he will acknowledge, unless you obtain *his* forgiveness, ours will be of little worth. And he will never deny either his pardon, or the help of his Spirit against future temptation, to those who ask it in humility and faith, for the sake of his Son our Savior, who died that our sins might be washed away in his blood. You believe that — don't you, Nelly?

“Then, my child, seek that forgiveness at once. You will never feel happy till you obtain it; you will never know real peace or safety till you feel that God, for Christ's sake, has pardoned all the past, and become your Father and Friend. I will leave you now, my child; but I leave you with a kiss of perfect forgiveness. Seek also that other and higher forgiveness; and remember the sacred promise, ‘If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.’”

Mrs. Morgan stooped and pressed her lips, in

a long, and earnest, and pitying caress, upon the flushed and tear-stained face of her erring but repentant child, and then moved quietly from the room, leaving her to the solemn silence of the gathering twilight, and of her own contrite thoughts.

The shades of evening threw a covering mantle over the kneeling figure of the repentant girl: we, too, will draw a veil over the workings of the young and sorrowful heart which opened itself in grief and shame to God. It is enough to say that Nelly thought, and felt, and prayed, as she had never thought, or felt, or prayed before; and that when, an hour later, she appeared at the tea-table, her father, after one long, keen, scrutinizing look at her pale and humbled, but calm and resolute, face, seemed satisfied that, if she had sinned, she had repented, and drew her to his breast in a long clasp of forgiving love, which seemed to bind the whole family together in a bond of such peace and happiness as they had never known before.

It only remains now to say, that it took Nelly but one day to decide to tell the whole truth to Mr. Porter and Miss Elliott. After passing so many weeks as a living lie, it had seemed so

sweet to her to feel that, at last, she was concealing nothing from those at home, that she longed to feel the same happy consciousness at school; and the kind smile which the principal bestowed upon her, when she first met him the next day, broke down the last barrier of reluctance to fulfil the bitter duty.

She asked permission to see him alone in the library for a few minutes, and that Miss Elliott might be sent for; and when they were seated there, with grave and listening faces, she told them, shamefully and sorrowfully, but bravely and truthfully, the sad story of her vanity and folly, which led her first into disobedience and deception, and yesterday into actual crime—how she had been mercifully enabled to restore what she had taken, within the hour, but how her conscience compelled her to reveal the whole truth. And they listened, surprised and displeased at first, it is true, but touched, at the last, with pity for her humiliation, and approval of her brave resolve to tell the truth at whatever cost. There could be no doubt of the reality of her repentance when proved so nobly, and both principal and teacher at once accorded a full forgiveness, and promised increased, instead of diminished, respect and confidence in the future.

Nelly went out from their presence with a lighter heart than she had known for many long, weary weeks, and feeling that at last she had a right to hold up her head before the whole world, and begin her life anew, walking steadily, henceforward, in a straight path, by the grace of God.

Not that she suddenly became perfect, little reader. Not that her besetting sins of vanity and love of dress, which had plunged her into all this sea of trouble and sin, were at once entirely overcome, or that she was never again tempted to conceal an act of folly.

But that she had learned, first, that finery, of itself, never brings happiness, and that falsehood brings trouble and disgrace; and secondly, the far deeper truths of her own weakness, and God's strength to "give grace to help in time of need."

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